Self-harm: images and text posted on social media platforms

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Abstract

Self-harm is a global public health challenge and the UK has one of the highest rates of self-harm across Europe. There is evidence to suggest that a large number of people are representing their self-harm online. Research on self-harm and the internet is an emerging field of inquiry which so far has focussed on whether social media use for self-harm is helpful or harmful. The aims of this research were to explore images tagged as self-harm on three social media platforms to identify what was being posted, to explore the meaning of images in relation to what they say about reasons for self-harm and motives for posting, and finally to understand how the social media platforms shaped the sharing of self-harm imagery.

A total of 602 images were analysed from Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. The images were analysed using a visual content analysis and a visual thematic analysis, which included a cross site analysis. There was also an exploration of the sites to understand their usability and how they supported, or hindered, the posting of self-harm imagery.

Images posted onto these three sites were a mix of photography, drawings, collages and text. When self-harm was present the predominant method was cutting on the arms or legs. Females were also represented more than males.

A number of themes were identified within and across sites which presented motivations for self-harm, ideas about the body, particularly the female body, motivations for posting images, and the link between self-harm and emotional distress.

The findings from this research offer a new understanding of how people are utilising social media to share messages about self-harm. The results were considered in relation to broader self-harm literature, implications for clinical work and future research.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The aims of this study were threefold: to describe the content of images relating to self-harm posted on social media sites; to explore the meaning of images in relation to what they say about reasons for self-harm and what light they shed on possible motives for posting; and, finally, to understand how the social media platforms shaped the sharing of self-harm imagery.

Research suggests that, although there are high prevalence rates for self-harm and repeated self-harm (Madge, et al., 2008), very few people are seeking help and accessing what could be deemed as "professional" help, for example from mental health services (Rowe, et al., 2014). In addition to this, studies have shown that social media sites and online forums are being used increasingly to discuss, represent and converse about this behaviour (Whitlock, Powers, & Eckenrode, 2006). There has also been a rise in the number of images being posted online about self-harm (Hodgekiss, 2014). Therefore, there is a wealth of information and content online that could offer an insight into this behaviour and could improve our understanding of this phenomenon, both socially and clinically.

The way people use social media to represent their self-harm visually is an under-researched area. In this chapter, I will first outline the nature of the clinical problem, then discuss the nature of the space in which I have explored this clinical problem: that of visual images on social media.

Self-harm

Defining self-harm

One of the most significant debates in the literature has been around the definition, or rather the multiple definitions, of self-harm. These are just a few examples of definitions in the literature:

> *"Self-mutilation (SM), the deliberate, nonsuicidal destruction of one's own body tissue…can best be understood as a morbid self-help effort providing rapid but temporary relief from feelings of depersonalization, guilt, rejection, and boredom as well as hallucinations, sexual preoccupations, and chaotic thoughts"* (Favazza, 1998).
>
> *"Parasuicide, defined as any non-fatal act in which an individual deliberately causes self-injury or ingests a substance in excess of any prescribed or generally recognised dosage"* (O'Connor & Armitage, 2004).

"Deliberate self-harm, here defined as self-inflicted damage to the surface of one's own body, not including an overdose or self-poisoning" (Lars-Gunnar, Wangby-Lundh, Paaske, Ingesson, & Bjarehed, 2010).

"Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is defined as repetitive, intentional, direct injury of one's body tissue without suicidal intent that is not socially accepted" (Groschwitz & Plener, 2012).

"Self-harm is any act of self-poisoning or self-injury carried out by a person, irrespective of their motivation commonly involving self-poisoning with medication or self-injury by cutting". With the following exclusions: overeating, body-piercing, body tattooing, excessive consumption of alcohol or recreational drugs, and starvation arising from anorexia (National Instiitute of Clinical Excellence, 2013).

One of the difficulties with having multiple definitions of self-harm is that researchers have failed to articulate what type of self-harm they are describing, whether there are any exclusions or whether there is a particular focus (i.e. self-injury). Studies also often conflate description and motive (Edmondson, Brennan, & House, 2016). Clearly, these definitional challenges influence our understanding of this behaviour as different forms of self-harm may serve different functions. Additionally, several articles leave self-harm undefined, leading to just as many interpretative challenges (Rodham & Hawton, 2012). Ougrin and Zundel (2009) highlight the challenges of defining self-harm using the concepts of intent, method, outcome and lethality and highlight the subjective nature of these leading to different explanations for the behaviour.

Self-harm rates

Self-harm is a global public health challenge (Mental Health Foundation, 2006; Cleaver, 2014). It is a strong predictor of completed suicide (Moran, et al., 2012) and premature death (Bengen, et al., 2012), with adolescents engaging in self-harm being more than four times likely to die by suicide (Goldacre & Hawton, 1985). Research suggests that those who engage in self-harm are more than likely to repeat this behaviour (Cleaver, 2007).

The UK has one of the highest rates of self-harm across Europe (Madge, et al., 2008) and studies have shown that self-harm accounts for over 150,000 admissions to A&E per year (Hawton, et al., 2007), 25,000 of whom are adolescents (Mental Health Foundation, 2006). However, it is widely acknowledged that incidences of self-harm are much higher than those reported by hospital admission statistics (Hawton, Rodham, Evans, & Weatherall, 2002), which highlights the difficulties in assessing prevalence rates by hospital data alone. Hawton and Rodham (2006) describe self-harm presentations to the hospital as the tip of the iceberg in self-harm behaviour.

There is some evidence to suggest that rates of self-harm are increasing (Cleaver, 2007) by as much as a 14% rise in hospital presentations since 2009 in one study (Bickley, et al., 2013).

Studies have suggested that the average onset age of self-harming behaviours is in childhood (Fox & Hawton, 2002) or early adolescence (Whitlock, Eckenrode, & Silverman, 2006). Evidence suggests that there is a reduction in these behaviours as people move into young adulthood, with females showing a greater continuity of this behaviour (Moran, et al., 2012).

The literature suggests that between 5-6% (Klonsky, 2011; Meltzer, et al., 2002) of the adult population have engaged in self-harm at some point in their lives and anywhere between 13% (Madge, et al., 2008; O'Connor, Rasmussen, Miles, & Hawton, 2009) and 28% (Brunner, et al., 2014) of adolescents. The numbers are even higher in clinical or forensic populations (Hawton, Linsell, Adeniji, Sariaslan, & Fazel, 2014; Briere & Gil, 1998). These statistics, which consider different rates of self-harm behaviour across the lifespan, prove that this is a highly prevalent behaviour and one of which we need a greater understanding.

Estimates of self-harm rates vary greatly depending on definition, survey type, participant type, age, population studied and timeframe covered (Ougrin & Zundel, 2009), which makes having a clear understanding of the prevalence rates particularly difficult.

Muehlenkamp, Claes, Havertape, and Plener (2012) posited that questionnaires using a simple yes/no response relating to self-harm behaviour revealed much lower self-harm rates than questionnaires that detailed particular behaviours, which could account for such a large disparity in self-harm rates across different studies.

There is also an acknowledgement that there is an absence of literature pertaining to the self-harm behaviours of people from different cultures and communities, such as those from LGBTQ communities, older adults and BME communities (Adler and Adler, 2007).

<u>Self-harm as a gendered behaviour</u>

Commonly, females are reported to enagage significantly more in self-harm (Madge, et al., 2008; O'Connor, Rasmussen, Miles, & Hawton, 2009; Moran, et al., 2012). However, in one hospital study, 44% of people presenting with self-harm were male (Cooper, et al., 2013), not an insignificant proportion, and in Manchester, between January 2008 and December 2009, 41% of all hospital reported self-injury incidents (3152) were by men (Dickson, et al., 2011). This suggests gender differences in methods of self-harm, although this may be masked by studies using hospital attendance, as the predominant method presenting to hospital is self-poisoning (Dickson, et al., 2011). Favazza (1998) suggested more men were engaging in self-harm as they were becoming more emotionally literate,

suggesting that, by positioning self-harm as a gendered issue, men may be marginalised from seeking help.

In exploring perceptions around females who engage in self-harm, Brickman (2004) challenged the persistent view of a "delicate cutter". Self-injury in the 1960s and 1970s was described as a white "problem" of teenage girls who were named "delicate cutters". Brickman (2004) argued that this description persists today, despite evidence that self-harm is undertaken by a broader spectrum of people. Brickman (2004) posits that few studies explore what society's role is in self-harm and what cultural assumptions are at play, particularly around femininity and the body. She further argued there is a dominant narrative of passivity in females, who are unable to act out (i.e. show aggression) and thus turn their distress inwards.

Motivation

Various theories have been put forward to explain the reasons why people engage in self-harm. Widely cited research, by Klonsky (2007) and Suyemoto (1998), highlights the most common negative functions of affect regulation and the alleviation of negative emotions, followed by self-harm as a form of self-directed anger or punishment, anti-suicide, sensation-seeking and expression of conflict over sexuality.

A recent review of self-reported accounts, however, found evidence for positive functions of self-harm including *"self-harm as a positive experience"* and *"defining the self"*. This review highlighted that positive functions were neglected in the research (Edmondson, Brennan, & House, 2016).

Individual or social problem

There is a debate in the literature about whether self-harm is an individual pathology linked to mental health difficulties or whether it is a social phenomenon.

Numerous studies have linked self-harm to a mental health problem (Haw, Hawton, Houston, & Townsend, 2001). However, researchers have argued that self-harm has been pathologised as a mental health difficulty, leading to a narrow focus on trying to understand self-harm as an individual problem (McAllister, 2003; Chandler, Myers, & Platt, 2011; Hodgson, 2004). This idea fails to focus adequately on the social context within which those who self-harm live, leading to assumptions based on flawed data collection and analysis about socioeconomic status, history of abuse and the female gender of a "typical self-harmer" (Chandler, Myers, & Platt, 2011). Hodgson (2004) argued that self-harm engenders distress, disgust and confusion in others, therefore people are more likely to label the behaviour as "deviant" and linked to a mental health problem, thus distancing themselves from the act. Instead of focussing on a mental health problem, Allen (2007) argued that the

pejorative and medicalised language used within the literature to describe "self-harmers" pushes people to challenge this view and find alternate ways to express themselves, which may explain why people are increasingly accessing social media sites.

In the main, the literature around self-harm comes from a psychiatric or medical perspective (Adler & Adler, 2007), yet as stated, most people engaging in self-harm do not seek help. Consequently, the literature in understanding this behaviour is skewed.

Adler and Adler (2007) conducted 80 interviews with college-aged people and adults who engaged in self-injury. They found learning about self-injury was transmitted through the media, health education and peer group interaction, thus describing a social aspect to the behaviour. They found that, although some were engaging in self-harm impulsively, many were engaging in self-harm as an intentional and planned act. They also reported on the beginnings of a sub-culture around participants' acceptance of self-injury being part of a lifestyle choice.

Self-harm may be related to psychological, social, or cultural disturbances and thus treatments that focus on correcting a disorder in an individual may be incomplete or misdirected (McAllister, 2003). Thus if self-harm is more complex than individual pathology, and is partly lived out in a social sphere, then only by exploring this sphere can we extend our understanding of this behaviour.

The Internet

> *"Every generation believes it is singular in its experience of rapid and monumental social and technological changes. Ours is no exception. The internet marks our epochal particularity"* (Baym & Markham, 2009).

The internet has had a significant impact on the world. For research, it has opened up a host of avenues for potential exploration; researchers need to select from a seemingly endless array of choices in how to effectively engage in research in this medium (Baym & Markham, 2009). There are important questions to consider for researchers around defining the boundaries of their projects, making sense of the issues around collecting data, how the notions of privacy influence researcher decision-making, how to produce work that is meaningful across time, location and culture and finally how to produce quality research in this area.

Space versus Text

Space and Text are two radically different concepts that are used when discussing the internet. The internet as "space" suggests that it is a place where human actors can be

observed, which, in turn, suggests that observing activity on the internet is akin to observing human behaviour. The internet as "text" suggests that the internet is a form of cultural production, like print media that should be "read" independently of any sense of authorship.

Bassett and O'Riordan (2002) argue that the dominant narrative of the "spatiality" of the internet creates ethical challenges and leads to a dismissal of viewing the internet as a repository of textual data and a medium of publication where users take control of the means of production.

The internet as space makes logical sense; the use of terminology such as "going online" and "internet community" suggests that human actors can be observed online. However, it can be argued that this is conflating the activity carried out on the internet and the person doing it (Bassett & O'Riordan, 2002), as if the activity is an extension of the person. The concept of internet as space has been pushed forward by the concern around how the internet is changing our social worlds (Tyler, 2002) again suggesting the internet is a place of social actors.

This is an interesting area for debate in terms of this study as the research was on social media, arguably a place or "space" for social interaction and communication, and yet the posters were creating "texts" which could be read, which were influenced by the sites. This study was interested in the "textuality" of the internet as I "read" the productions posters created.

The ethical arguments around these concepts are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Researching social media

As the focus of this thesis was health research, in the following sections I have drawn predominantly on the clinical literature pertaining to self-harm and social media. It is outwith the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough grounding in social media research as a whole but I will highlight some key literature to situate the study within its context.

Social media as a social world

Social media encompasses websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social media are defined as "*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow for user generated content*" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Our lives, particularly social aspects of our lives, are lived increasingly online. The use of social media has exploded in recent years with new applications, updates and changes to applications seemingly released monthly. The use of social media has substantially changed the way in which humans communicate and interact (McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Maxim, 2016), with a variety of social media sites ranging from image sharing, content

sharing, blogging and wikis. Currently, an estimated 2.46 billion people worldwide are using social media sites, with projections that this number will reach over 3 billion by 2021 (Statista, 2017b).

The internet has changed the way we view communities and the ease of photo and video sharing sites has meant that the internet now forms part of our identity, community and how we express ourselves culturally. Thus, the online world offers new possibilities for self-representation and identity construction. However, online worlds have also been described as potentially harmful and there is a recognition that the way we use online spaces may not be the same as in face-to-face spaces, leading to the potential for harm online as, perhaps, people are not constrained by the same norms of acceptable behaviour.

Nasi et al. (2014) presented how the online and offline world was becoming increasingly connected, with many traditional offline activities, such as socialisation and self-expression, becoming increasingly popular online. However, the authors found that some people were describing the online world as painful, disturbing, hateful and potentially harmful. The internet, particularly social media, has often been in the news around the harm it can inflict on others (Nasi, et al., 2014). A recent article, suggesting 1 in 4 adolescents had been targeted for internet abuse, showed that those from minority or ethnic backgrounds were more likely to experience online bullying (The Guardian, 2016). Researchers suggest that users of online forums find themselves engaging in a balancing act between threats and judgement and connection and support (Singleton, Abeles, & Smith, 2016).

Why people post?

A five year, multi-national study has recently concluded, which studied social media platforms and the content of social media posts (Miller, et al., 2016). This anthropological study group, led by Danny Miller, was interested in asking questions of why people posted on social media sites, whether people were replacing face-to-face relationships with on-screen ones, whether people were becoming more narcissistic and whether social media created or suppressed political action. They also wanted to understand what the consequences were of our large-scale use of social media. Nine anthropologists spent 15 months living in one of the following countries: China, Brazil, Turkey, Chile, India, England, Trinidad and Italy (Miller, et al., 2016). Here they engaged with people who utilised social media to understand the impact it was having in their lives.

Some of the broader key findings of this research are detailed that apply to social media in general but there were also key between-country differences. The authors found that social media sites were not making us more individualistic but rather could reinforce traditional groups such as families, caste and tribe. They found that public sites (such as Facebook) were conservative while private social media (i.e. messaging) could facilitate

social change, particularly around gender. They found that social media were not a separate entity but rather sites were where people lived their lives and spent their time and that they were an integral part of existence. They suggested that, for those living away from their families, social media could bridge the distance. Interestingly, there were also inter-generational ideas on "living" on social media with families in England. Parents stating that their children "lived in an online world" in which they were absorbed. Interestingly, in relation to this thesis, they found that images were replacing traditional forms of verbal and textual communication and that this had positive impacts for communities and individuals who were illiterate. The authors also suggested that images form the new way in which people are communicating; images are, therefore, becoming the core of conversations (Miller, 2015), supporting the idea that images should be explored to support the understanding of different topics.

Researching images on social media

With the widespread use of camera phones there has been the widespread development of image-sharing social media sites. Sharing images through social media has come to be commonplace, with over 3 billion images being uploaded every day onto a small number of platforms (Snapchat, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp) in 2015 (Meeker, 2016). Shared images have drawn attention to the role they have played in news events, such as the UK riots (Vis, Faulkner, Parry, Manyukhina, & Evans, 2013), the Egyptian Revolution (Kharroub & Bas, 2016) and the Arab Spring (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Mazaid, 2011). However, authors have argued that the focus of studies has often not been the nature of the images, but rather what they are saying about events (Thelwall, et al., 2016). In response to this, Thelwall et al (2016) conducted a data-driven study on the types of images shared on Twitter. A total of 800 images were analysed (400 from the UK and 400 from the USA) using visual content analysis. Most images were photographs with the aim of updating friends with what the user was currently doing. The authors suggested posts were a visual extension of face-to-face communication. A similar study, conducted using a content analysis, aiming to find what images were typically shared on Instagram, found that the most common image categories were friends, food, gadget, captioned photo (memes), pets, activities, selfies and fashion (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Both studies provide insight into the world of online images and what is typical in terms of what people post.

Researching images on social media can also provide insight into what is typically shared about certain issues. For example, a content analysis study on Instagram exploring "fitspiration" imagery found that the majority of images under this tag were of a thin and toned body type. This is important, as it suggests that there are cultural norms implicit in

how people post images of their body within this topic. Perhaps it would not be socially acceptable to post an image of an overweight body under the term "fitspiration" even if it was a healthy body. Most images also contained objectifying elements (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2016). Therefore, exploring the image content of a certain topic can provide insight into how users of social media are representing themselves within that topic.

The use of Hashtags

Hashtags are at their simplest a search-based mechanism for all posts sharing a specific textual attribute (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). User generated tags were already used on various social media platforms (e.g. Flicr and Delicious). However, a technologist proposed a way to improve contextualisation and content filtering by using channel tags using the hashtag symbol (#) on Twitter following user requests for the formation of Twitter groups based on specific interests (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). The use of the hashtag on Twitter gained momentum following the 2007 San Diego bushfires, where a hashtag was used to coordinate information. Hashtags have now moved across to other social media platforms and are ubiquitous across most sites (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Daer, Hoffman, & Goodman, 2014). There is an ever-growing literature base around hashtags of various forms, which suggests that hashtags can be used for a wide range of purposes including to find information, coordinate emergency relief, share information, share jokes, join a conversation, sort information, to contribute to conversations topics of interest and to mark tweets that are relevant (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Daer, Hoffman, & Goodman, 2014). In terms of responding to emerging events, Twitter stands out as a platform where users will utilise a specific hashtag to coordinate relief, source help and offer support - both emotional or physical (i.e. in response to the UK riots #londonriots).

Due to users utilising hashtags to organise, find and share information, this would suggest that hashtags also create communities of users who share specifics are aware of each other and engage with each other. However, this has been disputed with Bruns and Burgess (2011) positing that any imagined community is overestimating the importance of the hashtag.

The use of hashtags for the functions above could suggest that they are only used to inform or for practical reasons. However, research has shown that the use of hashtags has developed from a system to catalogue information to a way to emphasise emotions. This is referred to as meta-communication. Users across different social media sites will often utilise multiple hashtags in their posts which are used for emotional emphasis (i.e. #tired, #facepalm) rather than as a deliberate attempt to address an imagined community (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). One study looked to how users of social media sites utilise hashtagging functions for meta-communication and found they are used to offer meaning rather than a

function to be sourced or tagged (Daer, Hoffman, & Goodman, 2014). The authors looked at 500 examples of meta-communicative hashtags on five different social media sites and found that the meaning of hashtags lies in their function not their form, thus the function is for the poster to express something rather than the form as a hashtag to be found by others or to be part of a community. They found evidence for five meta-communicative content: emphasising, to add emphasis to a post; critiquing, to express judgement or verdict; identifying, referring to author of the post; iterating, expressing humour or parody; and rallying, bringing awareness to a cause.

Searching hashtags is a useful way to identify data for research, and is one of the dominant methods, as they provide easily searchable content, whether through social media sites themselves or through data metric programs for social media sites. However, a disadvantage to this way of collecting data is that may not capture all of the posts about a specific topic, only those that users have chosen to use a hashtag about a topic.

Self-harm and social media

Internet sites, particularly social media sites, are now being utilised by healthcare providers, charities, and mental health professionals to offer advice, support, guidance and to offer a new way of interacting with service users. Health professionals are considering the various uses for social media (Jalali, Sherbino, Frank, & Sutherland, 2015) and there are moves to start using social media sites for public health interventions (Freeman, Potente, Rock, & McIver, 2015; Allison, et al., 2012). Therefore, understanding more about the type of images on social media that represent self-harm is important to potentially influence future interventions.

Research on self-harm and the internet, particularly on social media, has been described as an emerging field of enquiry. There has been a rise in the use of social media for representing, exploring and discussing all types of self-harm (Duggan & Whitlock, 2012; Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010; Whitlock, Powers, & Eckenrode, 2006). Studies have shown that most posters on self-harm appear to be female (Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010) and seem to focus on cutting, as opposed to other forms of self-injury (Lewis & Baker, 2011; Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010; Duggan & Whitlock, 2012).

Alongside a growth in the use of online media, there has been a growth in the attempts to curtail and restrict the use of the internet for activities that are deemed harmful (Perez, 2013). For example, Instagram disallowed accounts, images and hashtags dedicated to glorifying, promoting or encouraging self-harm (Instagram, 2012). This suggests that Instagram have taken a position that all self-harm content is harmful to others, despite the motive or meaning of the post. Twitter and Tumblr do not have similar policies but both sites have ways of reporting self-harm content that includes a message to the poster to offer

resources. Interestingly in developments of social media, Facebook has recently introduced a Live function which allows anyone to post videos live. Recently, there has been controversy surrounding videos of two murders which have been uploaded to Facebook and transmitted live (The Independent, 2017). This raises interesting questions on how platforms are moderated. Facebook utilises a reporting network, alongside artificial intelligence algorithms. The rise of video streaming, and the challenges of this, may be a concern in relation to self-harm researchers in the coming months and years.

Despite social media sites finding ways to attempt to prevent people from posting content that can be viewed as harmful, people are finding ways to circumvent these restrictions. Moreno, Ton, Selkie and Evans (2016) explored the ways that posters are using various hashtags on Instagram to circumvent their policy on not hosting "harmful" content. The authors found that terms such as #selfharmmm and #secretsociety123 are being used to share self-harm content for others "in the know" to find. By finding alternative ways to post self-harm content, it suggests that the posting provides a positive function.

People are finding posting about self-harm helpful or at least that it is serving some kind of function for them.

Looking at other areas of academic interest may provide insight into the online world of self-harm. Bolsover (2011) used discourse analysis to explore how members of a pro-anorexia website represented their bodies online. Bolsover argued that the body is a communicative tool and an online presence can express feelings of isolation and voicelessness offline. The pro-anorexia movement is about taking control of the social construction of anorexic bodies and rejecting the medical, media, and social definitions of "normal" so by examining how users represent their bodies online can shed light on how the body is understood. There are several parallels between anorexia and self-harm; both have been described as a "hidden" or stigmatised behaviour, both areas of research have been focussed on clinical populations with a largely female focus and it seems those who engage with both of these behaviours have found a place online. Bolsover (2011) argued that understanding how disordered eaters construct their identities online can bring a more rounded understanding of the nature of anorexia where the body becomes the enemy. Similarly, understanding how those who self-harm construct their identities online can bring a greater understanding to our knowledge to this area.

A key debate in the literature has been about whether the internet, particularly social media, is helpful or harmful. Debates continue to rage about whether the internet is improving or harming participation in community life and social relationships, leading to the detriment of our health and wellbeing. Critics suggest that social media is causing people to become socially isolated and detached from genuine social relationships. However, this could potentially be a cultural difference in our understanding (e.g. how older

generations are viewing new developments as dangerous and detrimental and yet young people are forming new lives on there).

Does social media use increase suicide risk?

Concerns around the harmful nature of social media use for self-harm seem to have developed from research into the use of the internet and its influence on suicidal behaviour. One study found searching for the word "suicide" was related to suicidal ideation, leading the authors to suggest psychiatric interventions for people who search the term suicide (Jon, et al., 2012).

Similarly, Gunnell et al. (2012) investigated internet involvement in suicides by looking at coroners' reports. They found a small link between searching the internet for suicide content and then completing suicide (2.4% of 166 suicides). However, the authors acknowledged that coroners are unlikely to explore internet use in all suicides, so the figures were likely not a true representation of the link between suicide content and completed suicides. A critique of this is it could be a case of blaming the tool of searching, rather than it being more likely that people were intending to take their own lives and searched for methods rather than had no intent and then were persuaded to suicide. A history of searching does also not provide much information about what the mechanisms might be that would increase the risk of completed suicide.

Harris, McLean, and Sheffield, (2009) used an anonymous online survey to reach out to internet users who were at risk of suicide as defined by the Suicide Behaviours Questionnaire-Revised (Osman, et al., 2001). They explored suicide-related online behaviours and were interested in those who; searched for suicide information, who communicated about suicide, and sought support from others about suicidal ideation. They found that those who used the internet for suicide-related purposes reported higher levels of suicide risk variables, were more likely to be unemployed, to live alone, to report psychiatric disorders and to have lower levels of education. They also reported less perceived support from others in their real lives (i.e. not online). There were mixed results about whether online behaviours affected their suicidality. Participants reported that they felt less alienated online and found more support, yet around a third of participants reported that online behaviour did not help their suicidality and actually around 10% felt more suicidal.

Does social media use increase self-harm risk?

Taking the results of suicide studies, it is probably unsurprising that similar concerns have been expressed about the use of social media for self-harm related purposes.

Most research in self-harm and internet use appears to be focussed on whether this is helpful or harmful.

Concerns have been shared by many researchers about self-harm content online playing a role in perpetuating this behaviour (Lewis & Baker, 2011; Duggan & Whitlock, 2012) in that self-harm content could normalise or sensationalise self-harm and promote it to cope with distress. This has been referred to in some studies as "contagion" (Jarvi, Jackson, Swenson, & Crawford, 2013). Advice offered on forums around concealment (Lewis & Baker, 2011), alongside videos containing no content warning (Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010), has fuelled these concerns and added worry that online forums could reinforce the "hidden" aspect of self-harm. In support of this, O'Connor, Rasmussen, and Hawton (2014) found that 18% of 3,500 pupils who engaged in self-harm were influenced by what they found online.

Authors have attempted to replicate searches to explore what people are likely to find when searching for self-harm content (Swannell, et al., 2010; Singaravelu, Stewart, Adams, Simkin, & Hawton, 2015). Both studies found sites to be mainly recovery-oriented, supportive and preventative or positive in tone. However, searching negative terms (i.e. pro self-harm) brought up negative information. Swannell et al (2010) expressed concern that young people who engage in self-harm may not be able to regulate their emotions effectively and be more influenced by negative content. In support of this, a recent study found that adolescents who visited websites encouraging self-harm or suicide reported an increase in thoughts about killing themselves (Mitchell, Wells, Priebe, & Ybarra, 2014).

Despite concerns shared by researchers around the potential problems of self-injury content there are mixed results about whether this is documented concern or just moral panic.

Exploring comments on YouTube videos discussing self-harm, one study found that few comments (1.7%) stated the videos were triggering. Rather the most frequent comments were self-disclosure followed by admiration of video quality (Lewis, Heath, Sornberger, & Arbuthnott, 2012), suggesting that the content of the videos were not triggering and may not lead to influencing this behaviour in others. Another study found that self-harm images online were not viewed negatively by those who self-injure but could be soothing and used as a strategy to "re-feel" the cutting rather than engaging in cutting themselves, suggesting online images could offer a preventative function to those viewing the content (Sternudd, 2010). However, this research did not address the responses of those who had not engaged in self-harm and see images of this nature.

A recent systematic review found benefits of accessing online forums including a sense of purpose, being understood and feeling accepted by others (Dyson, et al., 2016). Other benefits included moving from receiving support to offering support, suggesting a

transformative function and receiving a non-judgemental response rather than an accusation of "seeking attention". Negative effects included an increase in suicidal ideation with the number of online communities accessed, triggers around motivation, concealment ideas and "how to" plans. The authors found that studies in this area are mainly descriptive in nature, so it was difficult to draw any robust conclusions. As is typical with research in this area, the studies in the review were mainly focussed on whether social media use was helpful or harmful and not really looking to understand why or what was being posted.

Other research exploring positive aspects of social media use found online forums were mainly supportive in nature (Lewis & Baker, 2011; Rodham, Gavin, Lewis, Bandalli, & St.Denis, 2016). In addition, they are shown to offer a level of support to people who are engaging in self-harm by offering help, encouragement, normalisation, support and scar management (Duggan & Whitlock, 2012; Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010; Sternudd, 2010) alongside information and guidance to those engaging in this behaviour (Prasad & Owens, 2001).

In a large-scale questionnaire study, social media sites were found to offer help, advice or support and were accessed more than sites offering advice on "how to" harm yourself. Additionally, this study found that 81% of individuals who accessed harmful sites also accessed helpful ones (Mars, et al., 2015).

The mixed picture of research in this area suggests it is important to know more about both what is found online, the impact it has and more importantly what users are utilising online in terms of what they are posting.

Lewis and Baker (2011) identified two theories that could account for this increased risk of engaging in self-harm following viewing self-harm content online, Script Theory and Cultivation Theory. Script Theory suggests that people develop scripts in response to their environment and use these scripts to guide their behaviour. For example, if people engaging in self-harm access self-harm content online this could reinforce and strengthen their script around their own self-harm. Cultivation theory suggests that, when people view repeated and specific messages, the content becomes normalised. Therefore, viewing repeated self-harm content will lead to a normalisation of that behaviour.

In response to concerns about the impact of self-harm content, researchers have offered guidance for how mental health professionals should assess online use in clients who engage in self-harm. One article suggested a functional analysis of online behaviour should be undertaken with young people engaging in self-harm, asking them to record online activity, alongside their thoughts, feelings and behaviour before and after the online activity. Also, the frequency, duration and time of day young people were on the internet (Lewis, Heath, Michal, & Duggan, 2012). A critique of this is that researchers are suggesting further clinical assessment and restriction, without an acceptance of the

relationship people, particularly young people, may have with the internet, and particularly social media.

Social media as a safe "private" space for self-harm

Much of the research on self-harm identifies the hidden nature of this behaviour and the stigma surrounding it (Adler & Adler, 2011). It can be of little surprise that those who engage in self-harm have found a place online, where one could argue that this behaviour can be discussed without fear of reprisal or judgement.

However, given that self-harm is often described as a hidden, private behaviour, it could be argued that there is something paradoxical about people posting content on social media sites of their self-harm, alongside images of themselves and their bodies. Studies have suggested that those who engage in self-harm have a negative view of those who present their injuries on social media and that they are viewed as "not authentic" and not having significant difficulties (Crouh & Wright, 2004). Rodham, Gavin, Lewis, Bandalli, and St.Denis (2016) explored posters' perspectives on posting self-harm content on social media when they were trying to keep their behaviour "private". The authors found that, although people were posting content about self-harm, they were doing so anonymously using pseudonyms and would comment on hiding their self-harm in their offline world, thus maintaining their "secret behaviour".

A recent systematic review found that those who engage in self-harm find it difficult to seek or receive care, due to not being certain who to seek care from or being worried about who they could trust (Dyson, et al., 2016). The authors also suggested that negative responses of health professionals were deterring help-seeking. The systematic review found that people who self-harm access the internet more frequently than those who do not, that young people placed a high value on peer-to-peer networks and that the popularity and anonymity of social media may be appealing for those who would like to seek information on an often-stigmatised issue. One study also found that the internet can decrease social isolation amongst young people, particularly those who were socially anxious and marginalised (Bell, 2014).

The research in this area then suggests that the anonymity of internet and social media sites are attractive to those engaging in what society may describe as "deviant behaviour". Thus, the internet can offer anonymity and a greater control over how young people present themselves, supporting the assertion that social media sites may be an anonymous space to safely explore self-harm behaviour. Therefore, it is on social media that a deeper understanding of this "deviant behaviour" can be gained.

<u>Why are people posting self-harm content online?</u>

Surprisingly, there are few studies exploring the meaning of self-harm content or the content itself. The literature so far has explored quite simplistic questions: What is being posted? Is it harmful? Does it trigger others?

More recent studies have started to look further into the use of social media sites. One study explored posts on Tumblr. Authors investigated 3,360 posts that were tagged as 'depression' (Cavazos-Rehg, et al., 2017). A total of 82% of posts were related to depression, suicide or self-harm. Additional themes included loneliness or feeling unloved (15%), self-harm (14%), suicide (15%) and self-loathing (15%).

Seko, Kidd, Wiljer, and McKenzie (2015) explored posters' motivations by interviewing 17 participants who create online self-harm content. Two themes were presented in the study: self-orientated motivation and social motivation. Self-oriented motivation focussed on individual functions for creating content. These included self-expression, to reflect on experiences and to mitigate self-harm urges. Sites were seen as a convenient repository for personal memories and for documenting experiences, both in terms of triggers and feelings. Participants also described presenting content as a way to talk about difficult emotions. A final self-oriented emotion was to use posting content to distract or quell an urge to self-harm.

Social motivations included posters feeling part of a community, to have a sense of belonging and to be understood. This led to being able to provide emotional support to others who were experiencing similar difficulties. Participants described a lack of emotional support offline which they were seeking to make up for online. Interestingly, participants also described the act of being a "champion" for self-harm; they wanted to show the public, or those reading the posts, what was "behind the self-harm", that they were not manipulative or attention-seeking but rather they were wanting to put a human face on a misunderstood behaviour.

Negative aspects of using social media included description of a "crowd mentality" where people would see more severe content and want to then post more graphic images. Additionally, for some participants, viewing self-harm content made them want to engage in self-harm. However, others found that viewing content provided some relief (Seko, Kidd, Wiljer, & McKenzie, 2015).

Jones et al. (2011) interviewed participants who were engaging in self-harm and accessing online discussion forums. Participants reported learning more about mental health from online discussions forum than elsewhere. They also reported finding it easier to talk to strangers online than family or friends; they valued the anonymity that an online forum offered and reported feeling that they were not judged online. Other motivations included supporting others, seeking out peers, voicing thoughts and showcasing their art, enhancing

self-image and raising social awareness (Jones, et al., 2011), which consistent with Seko, Kidd, Wiljer and McKenzie's (2015) findings.

Self-harm and the visual

No-one can over-estimate the impact of a visual image. There have been examples where images have shaped and changed public opinion (e.g. the picture of Aylan on the beach (Dearden, 2015)). We are visual beings and respond to a visual world.

Self-harm is often talked about in visual terms (Franzen & Gottzen, 2011), particularly around direct self-injury, and those engaging in this behaviour often talk about the stigma associated with visible wounds.

In exploring self-harm online, we would only understand part of the story if only the textual content was reviewed. The body is often seen as a communicative tool. Traditional, i.e. textual and verbal, forms of expression do not tell us the whole story, and in some cases, can stifle expression, for example for those who struggle to articulate their motives.

There are a small number of studies that have started to explore the visual representation of self-harm online. Seko (2013) undertook a multimodal analysis of direct self-injury images on Flickr, exploring how self-injury was framed and represented in photographs. Seko (2013) found that the photos fell into three broad categories: 1) to bear witness to self-injury; 2) a mode of reminiscence; and 3) self-portraits. Seko (2013) concluded that photos were used to allow people to challenge dominant and stigmatising discourses about self-injury and share their own realities.

Sternudd (2010) explored 6,000 photographs of direct self-injury from an internet community of those who self-harm. Sternudd (2010) found that images, commonly, were by posters who presented themselves as female; they usually presented a body part, most commonly an arm, and were usually presented without contextual information. Sternudd (2010) argued self-injury transfigured emotional pain and made it concrete. The visual aspect of self-injury was key, as it offered proof that the inner pain had been transformed. He argued, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that cutting the skin was a way of making sense of pain and the cutting was an act of resistance not based on traditional gender roles, but rather that skin united genders and created a location for making sense of the world. Thus, the cutting of the skin represented other, internal, struggles of the person.

Finally, Edmondson (2013) explored images on self-harm blogs and found that visual content was used as a means of escape, as a means of self-expression and to communicate with others (Edmondson, 2013).

These studies suggested there was scope to develop greater awareness of self-harm through understanding the images people used to represent this behaviour and why the

internet might have offered a platform that conventional health support was not. By exploring the visual milieu, I hoped to add new knowledge to our understanding of self-harm.

Present Study

Given the representation of self-harm in the deviant and non-normative discourse, it is understandable that people are seeking new ways to represent themselves that challenge this narrative. The internet, like other social environments (school, families, neighbourhoods), plays a powerful role in shaping opportunities for adaptive and maladaptive social interaction and each platform possesses its own culture and character and is governed by subtle and overt norms and rules (Whitlock, Powers, & Eckenrode, 2006).

People are posting images representing their self-harm in record numbers and yet, despite this, there is little research available exploring the content and meaning of the images to see what they could tell us about this behaviour. In exploring only textual representations of self-harm, we are potentially ignoring a multitude of understandings about people's motives for self-harm. We are also only focussing on a small piece of the picture, if research is only focussed on whether internet or social media use is helpful or harmful.

This is a clinically relevant area for psychology. We have seen that self-harm is a prevalent, repetitive and highly concerning public health problem, shared across the globe. Current healthcare is widely regarded as inadequate, with many people experiencing distress or experiencing negative responses after seeking help for self-harm (Cleaver, 2014). Much of the literature is focussed on questionnaire or clinical studies and yet we know that the majority of people engaging in self-harm are not presenting clinically. In addition to this we know that people are accessing social media to represent their self-harm. There is already a move to utilise social media for health-giving advice and there is the potential to explore these platforms as an avenue for intervention. If we can understand how people are communicating their self-harm visually, this has the potential to enhance our knowledge of this area and improve clinical practice, therefore offering greater understanding and improving the practice of clinical psychologists who offer therapeutic input to those engaging in self-harm.

Adler and Adler (2011) found that people who engage in self-harm and use the internet move within and between online forums, depending on what they need so exploring just one platform offers only a small insight into this behaviour. Therefore, I chose to explore three of the most popular image sharing social media sites.

This exploratory study was undertaken with the acknowledgement that the medium on which it has been conducted is changeable, and the inherent research challenges with this. However, the concepts under study remain the same. This was about how people are choosing to represent their self-harm visually on social media platforms.

Research Questions

The aims of this study were threefold: to explore the content of images relating to self-harm posted on social media sites; to explore the meaning of images and potential motives involved; and finally to understand how the social media platforms shaped the sharing of self-harm imagery.

I sampled from selected sites to explore the following research questions:

Content

1. What images and text are people posting about self-harm?
2. What form do the images and text take?

Meaning

3. What do the images and text tell us about the motives for self-harm?
4. What do the images and text tell us about the motives for posting on social media?

The understanding of these questions was influenced by the constraints on form and content that are apparent in the platforms themselves. The final research question was:

5. How do the image-sharing sites aid our understanding of how particular cultures or communities manage discourse about self-injury?

CHAPTER TWO: REFLEXIVITY

"A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (Malterud, 2001).

Qualitative research, in the main, acknowledges the influence of the researcher on the research. Some particular types of analysis make this influence more explicit. For example, IPA describes a double hermeneutic where the researchers' perspective is explicitly involved in the analytical process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Reflexivity is a researcher's ability to attend systematically to the effort of knowledge construction, at every stage of the research, in particular to the effect of the researcher (Cohen, 2006). Woolgar (1998) describes a continuum of reflexivity ranging from radical constitutive reflexivity to benign introspection and reflection. What separates reflection from reflexivity is an "*explicit evaluation of the self*" (Woolgar, 1988).

Thus, being a reflexive researcher helps to bring the researchers' first-hand experiences into the public domain. By doing this, those reading the research will be aware of a researcher's position, presuppositions, values and the lens they may be conducting the research through.

Reflexivity in research also plays an ethical role. By making the researcher's position more explicit, it helps reduce the likelihood that the researcher's perspective will dominate the research and silence what is presented in the content (Shaw, 2010). Thus, reflexive practices increase transparency in qualitative research.

Haynes (2014) argued that the interpretations and theoretical assumptions of the researcher help to construct the reality of the research or, at least, the perceptions of reality. Drawing on emotions can also support reflexivity; Haynes (2014) suggested writing down assumptions and presuppositions about the subject area and revisiting them throughout the process to support this.

There are some formal ways in which researchers can foster reflexivity, including the keeping of a reflexive journal. I chose to keep a reflexive journal throughout the research process. In this journal, I recorded all methodological decision making, discussions with supervisors and reflections on my own values, and thoughts and feelings at each stage. This journal acted as a way of recording and exploring my position in the research, and provided an opportunity to develop my understanding of the subject and how this changed over time. Additionally, research supervision was utilised to ensure there were open reflective discussions about both the research and the analytic process.

Who am I?

I am a Psychologist in Clinical Training. This training involves a structured program of academic and clinical work. The clinical work involves working with people in distress, some of whom engage in self-harm. Prior to the training, I spent 12 years working with children and families, in social care and in the voluntary sector working with numerous young people who engaged in self-harm. I also completed a Masters Research project on adolescent help-seeking for self-harm.

These experiences led me to choose research in the area of self-harm and to approach supervisors who were experts in this field. Therefore, I did not enter this project with a blank slate and no understanding of this area. I have a significant understanding of the clinical presentation of self-harm, particularly in young people, and have a keen interest in this area. I was moved by a client who engaged in severe self-injury. This was in my first role after university working in a residential unit. I found this experience deeply distressing at the time and struggled with my reactions to such significant self-injury. This led to me to wanting to understand this behaviour more and was an influencing factor in wanting to work with adolescents. These experiences also showed me how self-harm can strike fear into clinicians at all professional levels, and how people can respond negatively to those who engage in self-harm, which can, in turn, influence their self-harm behaviour.

Therefore, the lens through which I engaged in this project was a lens of wanting to understand self-harm further, to understand people's motives, to explore what avenues people use to discuss their self-harm and look for potential ways in which people who engage in self-harm could be supported. Thus, my starting assumption is that self-harm was harmful and that those who engage in self-harm need some support, which could come from a variety of avenues.

What did I expect in the literature?

It was important to name my presuppositions about the literature. Before I completed my scoping exercise, I noted in my journal that I imagined most of the images in the data set would be of females and most of them would be of direct self-injury. This is not the totality of what was reflected in the data set. However, this speaks to what I might have paid attention to in the data set initially, or what I was most drawn to.

What is seen and not seen?

As described above I expected to see a majority of female self-injury in the data. These presuppositions would have affected what I paid attention to. In addition to this, it is

important to reflect on who I am as a person and how that would have affected my "reading" of the images.

I am a 37-year-old white woman. I come from a working-class background. I do not have any personal experience of engaging in self-harm but had a close friend who had a history of self-harm at university. These were the first conversations I had around self-harm and influenced my interest in this area. My supervisors are both white and both experts in this field of research. As three white researchers with an interest in self-harm, it is important to ask questions of our bias and privilege. It is likely that images that relate to mine, and my supervisors' experience would be more relatable. Thus, it should be noted that those characteristics that we do not embody might be more difficult to see, for example, black and ethnic minorities or those with physical disabilities. It is also interesting to think about how age is viewed. I am 37. With my supervisors, we cross an age spectrum. However, a substantial proportion of social media site users are adolescents or young adults. Therefore, we may hold bias in the way younger posters are viewed or may not have access to the cultural background necessary to understand the phenomena of their social media use.

In addition to this, the analysis might have limitations based on the awareness of cultural references from myself and my supervisors. For example, in one of the images a battle mage (a gaming spell caster) was represented, and in another a character from the film Star Wars. There may have been cultural references within the images that were not identified.

My experience of analysing images?

Although I had approached my supervisors with ideas about self-harm research, I had not expected to engage in visual methods. However, the more I considered this field the more excited I became by the prospect. I see myself as a visual person. I engage with social media and share images of my day-to-day life. There are numerous images of me posted on various social media, both mine and my friends, and I use social media sites to catalogue events and experiences. Therefore, I may have been especially sensitive to interpretations that imply posters have a problem with public/private boundaries.

Visual methodology was a novel experience for me but also seemed like an innovative way to gain a deeper understanding of self-harm and how this is talked about in society, outside of the clinical understanding. Often self-harm is described as a private event, so exploring how people use a public media to discuss "private" behaviours seemed like an important task that had not been researched with any depth.

Having not engaged in visual analysis before I searched for tools to support me to do this, however found that these were lacking. Being quite a pragmatic, structured, researcher,

I like to be able to follow a clear and concise analytic plan. As one was not available for analysing images, I needed to create my own concise plan. This supported me to focus on the research questions without getting lost in them.

It is important to note that there were fluid and occasionally conflicting discussions with my supervisors throughout the analytic process. Images are polysemic and are viewed through a lens of our own experiences. There were occasional examples where I held different views about the meaning of images than my supervisors. The views of my supervisors were of course views that were developed through their own lens of experiences. One of my supervisors is a professor of psychiatry and has many years' experience of working in hospital settings with people presenting with self-harm. They saw in some images a sense of playfulness and ambivalence that I did not always see as they were reminded of patients they had worked with.

What about my emotions?

As Haynes (2014) describes, drawing on researchers' emotional experience can be used to support greater reflexivity. I was surprised at what I responded to emotionally. I had expected that images of self-harm would have triggered me emotionally, and, although this was occasionally the case, they were not the most emotive images.

The images of self-injury were categorised into superficial, moderate and severe. The images that were severe in nature provoked some sadness and occasional disgust. I found severe self-harm to be difficult to observe and felt a physical response to particularly graphic images. However, moderate and superficial self-harm did not provoke the same response. Images of superficial self-harm occasionally provoked feelings of annoyance. Reflecting on this has allowed me to consider how clinicians respond to different types of self-harm. I am able, in my role, to support clinicians to develop and maintain empathy for the function of self-harm, whether or not the act appears severe, and yet when I was analysing images I was having similar negative reactions.

The images that provoked the most emotional response were those that presented images and ideas around loneliness. Those which showed self-portraits and expressed sentiments of being isolated or alone made me feel sad and helpless and made me think about the function of posting images.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

My research was focussed upon the nature of self-harm, which I explored by examining the way it is represented visually on social media. My research interest was in how visual images are used to communicate messages about self-harm. My research was not therefore primarily about the individuals who post, who they are, what else they do, and neither was it primarily about social media. In the next sections, I explore the reasons for the methodological approach I chose.

Qualitative research

This study was qualitative by design. Qualitative methods are used by researchers interested in how people make and interpret meaning, tell stories about their lives and experiences, and how they communicate these with others (Stainton Rogers & Willig, 2008). Predominantly, qualitative research has relied on the spoken or written word as its medium of analysis (Reavey, 2011).

In 2000 (p503) Holliday posited that *"visual representations…have been largely ignored in the social sciences".* The use of images to research phenomena is not new in methodological approaches but is rooted in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology (Rouse, 2013). However, the application of visual methodology is now becoming increasingly common across the social sciences (Reavey, 2011). Researchers have noted that the increase of visual forms of communication, and the rise in the importance of the visual in contemporary social and cultural practices, has led to the large-scale development and engagement with visual research methods by social scientists (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008; Rose, 2013).

Visual research methods are defined as the use of visual materials in part of the evidence gathering process to explore research questions (Rose, 2013). The development of ideas around visual culture defined as *"The shared practices of a group, community or society through which meanings are made out of visual, aural, and textual world of representations"* (Rose, 2013: 3) is an important idea in relation to my research, as social media sites can be construed as the shared practices of a group, community or society.

Frith, Riley, Archer and Gleeson (2005) described a wariness in the acceptance of visual methods in the social sciences due to visual material being open to multiple and subjective interpretations. However, there is growing consensus that all data are open to multiple and subjective interpretations and visual methodologies can help us to access multiple realities and gain a greater understanding of different phenomenon (Reavey, 2011).

As visual research methods are becoming more accepted as a form of qualitative data production and methodology, and are entrenched in major fields of inquiry (health,

sociology, nursing studies, education), the question over how to approach the data in a scientific analytic or theoretical manner gains increasing importance (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008).

Visual research methods do not yet have the same structured analytic approaches as do those focussed on textual data. Rose (2013) describes visual research methods as unrestricted and involving a variety of diverse methods. Gillian Rose, an expert in the field of visual methodologies, acknowledges that what the methodology entails is not often made explicit and suggests a certain element of *"intuition…a certain sensibility"* is implicit in visual methodological approaches (Rose, 2012). Even her book gives little practical guidance on "how to" engage in visual methodologies. Rather, it provokes thoughts about visual methodologies and discussion around the cultural meaning and power of visual images.

The challenges of engaging in a methodological approach that is not clearly structured are clear. Gleeson (2010) argued that psychologists, who have previously not engaged significantly with visual methodologies, lack confidence. Psychology training is underpinned by the assumption that all analytic procedures and sampling strategies must be visible and explicit. In reading research with transparent methods and the "working out", we can evaluate that research and replicate said research. Thus, visual methodologies that are not open and explicit in their procedures are deemed more challenging, and perhaps more intimidating.

Gleeson (2010: 316) argued that psychologists are well suited to engaging in visual methods as *"we are embedded within cultures and construct knowledge from cultural resources and address questions that are culturally meaningful. Our methods are the basic human skill of watching carefully what people do and listening carefully to what they say"*. Thus, psychologists need to be able to develop skills in this area and to offer a confident interpretation of visual data without explicit techniques to guide them.

In addition to challenges inherent in analysing visual data, there are numerous challenges in internet research in general. The internet of today is very different to the internet of 2006, and will be very different from the internet in 2026. Moore's law in 1965 was a prediction that the processing capacity of computers would double once every 18-24 months, which has proven quite resilient over time (Karpf, 2012). This provides some idea of how quickly technology is changing. Since this project was imagined both Twitter and Instagram have been through changes, with the former disallowing Instagram images to show in their news feed and the latter being bought by Facebook, and are set for another major change (e.g. Twitter possibly moving to a larger character count (Wagner, 2016)). These are challenges for all internet research, however one could argue that the concepts of this research project were the same despite of possible technological changes. This study

explored images of self-harm across three social media sites. In some ways, the sites themselves were insignificant, the three were chosen because they are three of the most popular social media sites that allowed for image sharing. The sites themselves undoubtedly influenced the types of posts', however, in two years people may have moved on to utilising a different image sharing sites. Thus, this thesis was about images posted onto social media platforms to see what those images could tell us about self-harm. Thus, it was not a detailed exploration of the sites themselves nor the actors and posters within it.

Choosing the Sample Sites

There are a number of social media sites that could have been utilised in this study. This section will briefly detail the breadth of social media sites available and will justify why Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter were used.

A scoping exercise was completed prior to this study. This scoping exercise set out to explore the potential number of social media sites available and to identify which sites would be the most useful to use in this study. As this was an exploratory study with little prior research exploring self-harm imagery on any social media site, my main interest was to identify sites that were popular and could be said to be utilised by a large number of people. I identified the top ten most popular social media sites as: Facebook; YouTube; WhatsApp; Facebook Messenger; WeChat; QQ; Instagram; QZone; Tumblr; and Twitter (Statista, 2017a).

Following this, I explored the sites presented to identify those that were listed as common image or photo sharing sites. I also looked at the sites themselves to identify their intended purpose. The searchability of each site was also explored, as I had chosen to engage in a manual image extraction. From the ten most popular social media sites, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook all were deemed appropriate. The other sites listed were not appropriate as YouTube is for sharing videos, while WeChat, QQ and Qzone are all Chinese social media sites or instant messaging services. Similarly, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp are instant messaging services. Although Facebook consistently rates as the most popular social media site worldwide and has the largest UK market share, I decided not to use this site as the manual searchability for self-harm imagery was poor, alongside there being a great deal of private content on Facebook. There also appeared to be many images from professional accounts. In addition to the above, I also explored Flickr and Pinterest sites as these were often detailed as two of the most popular image-only sharing sites (Lock, 2013). Pinterest was discounted due to poor searchability; Flickr was discounted due to presenting a large number of, what appeared to be, art projects about self-harm.

The popularity of the sites was the most important factor in considering which social media site to use, as I was interested in what typically was posted about self-harm. Instagram was identified as a social media site whose purpose was for the sharing of images. Tumblr allowed for a greater breadth of content shared and yet was often identified as a visual content sharing site (Lifewire, 2017). Therefore, Instagram and Tumblr were both chosen as research sites. As this was an exploratory study I took the decision to look at a different type of social media site to explore the potential differences or similarities in terms of images relating to self-harm. As detailed above, Twitter was identified as one of the most popular social media sites that allows image sharing. Therefore, Twitter was chosen as the final research site.

Pen portraits of sites chosen

Instagram

Instagram markets itself as a free photo and video sharing service (Instagram, 2017a). Users can share their photos and also utilise numerous filters to make the images appear different (i.e. different colours, techniques, shading). In 2016, Instagram added a new dimension by creating a more immersive shopping experience alongside direct messaging and adding albums (multiple images per post) (Hunt, 2017). In relation to Instagram's involvement with mental health, the company recently launched a mental health campaign, #hereforyou, to raise awareness of mental health difficulties with a promotional video where people from Instagram talked about the support they have found on the platform. Instagram also offers a space with information about eating disorders which includes support networks (Instagram, 2017b). Interestingly, however, the only mention of self-harm or self-injury falls within their "reporting something" section. Instagram has disallowed self-injury or self-harm posts to be searched or tagged (Moreno, Ton, Selkie, & Evans, 2016). Hashtags are widely used on Instagram, which means people can follow or find posts tagged with things they are interested in. In terms of posting content, this can be done through an app or on a desktop, although it was created to be used initially by mobile phones.

In my manual search of self-harmmm (as the platform does not allow self-harm searching) on the 11th January 2016, I identified 1,900,404 posts with this tag. I identified a mix of content of self-harm posts which included photographs, sexualised content, quotes, inspirational messages and bedroom pictures. You can now no longer do a manual search using #selfharmmm. Using a manual search on the 17th August 2017, I found 29,300 posts for #selfharn (note the use of the n), suggesting the shifting terminology to reflect self-harm representations on Instagram. As of April 2017, Instagram reported 700 million active monthly users (Statista, 2017c). Despite the difficulties in accessing full data for how many

people are posting about self-harm given the restrictions detailed, Instagram clearly presented a site of interest for this thesis.

Tumblr

Tumblr is a microblogging site and markets itself as a platform that allows you to *"effortlessly share anything. Post text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos from your browser, phone, desktop, email or wherever you happen to be"* (Tumblr, 2017a).

An exploration of Tumblr was conducted in 2014 that reported Tumblr had more rich content than other microblogging platforms, as it contained a hybrid of social networking, traditional blogs, and social media (Chang, Tang, Inagaki, & Liu, 2014). There is no length limitation per post and it supports a variety of media such as photos, videos and audios. In Tumblr, users tag their blogs to categorise them using hashtags but the tags do not have to be in the main body of the text. In a study on Tumblr, researchers found photos and text accounted for 92% of the content, with the most popular content including pets, scenery, music, photography, sports and medical. Medical included body, pain, depression, drugs, problems and blood (Chang, Tang, Inagaki, & Liu, 2014), suggesting an interesting potential link with self-harm. When posting an image tagged as self-harm, a help page pops up with help-line numbers. There is also a report function. In terms of mental health support, Tumblr has recently launched initiatives for Mental Health Month including 'Post it Forward' - a space to discuss difficult subjects (e.g. bullying) (Cohen, 2017). Posting an image is simple on Tumblr. You can upload from your phone or computer and can also use the app to take a picture. There is space for text and you can include numerous hashtags. As of July 2017, Tumblr reported over 357 million blogs (Statista, 2017d).

Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging site, which is set up to broadcast daily short burst messages to the world (Gil, 2017). Twitter markets itself as a platform to show *"what's happening in the world and what people are talking about right now".* Their mission is to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers (Twitter, 2017a). In their New User FAQs Twitter report that they are a *"service for friends, family and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages".* They state: *"people post tweets, which may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text"* (Twitter, 2017b).

Twitter offers the opportunity to follow people to see their content (tweets) who do not have to follow you back. A character count of 140 means that you can scan lots of informative tweets relatively quickly and, thus, it has grown to be used as a news sharing site in addition to microblogging (Gil, 2017). There are numerous celebrity and famous

tweeters lending an intimacy to this platform, where people feel they have a connection with those they are following. Twitter can be accessed via an app and via the internet. On Twitter, you can search trends via hashtags, which are topics that a lot of people are talking about, e.g. #FridayFeeling and #Eurovision. Twitter have been open about their use of personal data and, in a recent update to their privacy policy have started to collect browsing data which will lead to targeted adverts and this information will be stored for 30 days (McGoogan, 2017). Uploading images to Twitter is simple and the app allows you to upload images saved or to take a picture through the app. You can choose to tag using the hashtag system or your tweets are also searchable through the words you use. In terms of community, you can connect with other users but research has found that there is low reciprocity on Twitter (meaning people do not follow back) and high homophily (where users follow those that are similar to them) (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010).

As of June 2017, Twitter reported 328 million monthly active users (Statista, 2017e). Using Tweetbinder, a program that can search keywords on Twitter, I found that over a 24-hour period there were 1,989 tweets that included the text self-harm (Tweet Binder, 2017). This provides some information about the scale of the use of the term self-harm on Twitter which, given the number of monthly users, the number of tweets using the keywords of self-harm is surprisingly small.

Choosing an analytic strategy

Standard research practices are not always suited to such a rapidly changing medium. Although I analysed images, not necessarily conducted research on the internet as a medium itself, it was important to position these images in the context of the internet, as they are posted on to social media, and that the media in turn will have shaped the content. Karpf (2012) suggested research in internet time (i.e. constantly developing) needs to be question driven, with flexible methods developed to suit the questions posed.

In the same vein that Gleeson (2010) cautioned against, I sought to identify an approach that would support me to analyse images appropriately. I explored various approaches that one could use in analysing images, including discourse analysis (Rose, 2012), content analysis (Bock, Isermann, & Knieper, 2011), polytextual thematic analysis (Gleeson, 2010) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also explored other approaches such as iconography and semiotics (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). As there is such a variety of methodological approaches to the analysis of photography and images, a common ground remains to be established (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008). As Gleeson (2010: 316) states: *"When we turn to the visual we have no rule book to support our interpretations and must fall back on a wider disparate range of texts and*

experiences to justify our interpretation of the image". Therefore, I looked to the range of disparate visual methods that had been utilised and looked to develop an explicit procedure for analysing the images.

One can become overwhelmed in exploring the variety of ways and means of analysing the visual, especially as published research analysing visual data is often not explicit about the method of analysis. These are some methodological approaches I could have utilised to approach this research.

Discourse Analysis

Visual discourse analysis can be used to explore text, communication and visual images. This method can explore how meaning and ideologies are constructed in the context they are presented, alongside how language (including the language of an image) is used in social relationship of power (Chuang & Chen, 2014). Similar to other visual methods, there is no one established method of discourse analysis for images. Those who have engaged in visual discourse analysis suggest three levels of analysing images: the composition of the photograph including content and design; the context of production and publication including historic events; and the reception of the image and how it is communicated (Christmann, 2008). Discourse analysis, though a worthy analytic approach to explore power and meaning of images, is not well suited to exploring a large data set of images to develop an understanding of the content and meanings.

Semiotics

Semiology is interested in how signs produce meaning. It has been applied to a range of sign systems including fashion, menus, street signs, fairy tales and advertised images (Penn, 2000). Semiology provides a toolkit for approaching sign systems and grew out of the study of structural linguistics. The aim of semiology is to make explicit the cultural knowledges, which are required for someone to read and understand the image. It involves choosing an image, or images, identifying the elements in the image, analysing the elements of significance, and then drawing on broader cultural knowledge to understand said image. The strengths of semiology are that it allows an in-depth reading of an image to understand all the cultural references and how the image relates with others. Criticisms of semiology are that it may not be replicable amongst different researchers and may present an idiosyncratic analysis of the data that has little meaning to others apart from the researcher (Penn, 2000). Additionally, it does not provide a clear structure for analysing a large number of images to look for themes and meanings.

Visual Content Analysis

Content analysis is the systematic analysis of well-defined, audio, textual, and visual content with the aim to show trends in the content of images rather than a profound understanding of a single message (Bock, Isermann, & Knieper, 2011). Content analysis is an appropriate method for analysing images because, although it is not capable of dealing with the nuances of individual images, it is able to characterise properties of a large set of images in a systematic way, avoiding at least some of the potential biases of more detailed investigations into small sets of images (Thelwall, et al., 2015).

Commonly used to produce generalizable predictions, content analysis aims to show trends in content rather than a profound understanding of a single message (Bock, Isermann, & Knieper, 2011).

Strengths of content analysis include that it is a relatively uncomplicated method. It can reduce the complexity of media content, and provide an objective account of what is represented in the data. Challenges to content analysis, particularly in relation to the visual, include the challenge of noting the content of a visual image without considering the context in which the visual was produced.

Visual content analysis is a suitable method for analysing images representing self-harm. However, Bock, Isermann and Knieper (2011) suggest additional thought needs to be given to how to situate the images in their context to understand them fully.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis can minimally organise and describe the data set; however, it can go much further than this and offer a level of interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis answers the limitations of the content analysis, combining the analysis of frequency of codes with analysis of their meaning in context (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis, at this latent level, starts to identify underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Although thematic analysis arguably involves coding as well it offers a more prescriptive way of paying attention to the qualitative aspects of the images than content analysis..

Thematic analysis has been criticised for being too simplistic, descriptive and an "anything goes" approach. Braun and Clarke (2006), however, argue that rather than anything goes it is a flexible approach that has been poorly demarcated and that a great deal of qualitative analysis is thematic without naming it as a method.

There is also a variety of theory driven approaches that could have been used. For example, feminist theory could have been utilised to explore the potential gender inequality

of social media platforms as a social space and to see how this could influence the posting of self-harm imagery. However, as this is a new research area it was important to firstly understand the broad content and themes of what data was available.

A Visual Content Analysis of the images and Thematic Analysis of the images were chosen as methodological approaches to answer the research questions. This decision was made as these were the two methodological approaches that would provide answers to the first four research questions:

Content

1. What images and text are people posting about self-harm?
2. What form do the images and text take?

Meaning

3. What do the images and text tell us about the motives for self-harm?
4. What do the images and text tell us about the motives for posting on social media?

Visual Content Analysis was chosen as it provided an analytic approach to understand the content of the images posted onto the three social media sites. The first two research questions relate to the content of images across the three sites to gather an understanding of the different types of images, what form the images took, who or what was in the images and to provide an idea of the variety of images within the sites. Therefore, a content analysis, which aimed to show trends in the content of images, was a suitable method.

Thematic Analysis was chosen as it offered a way to develop an understanding of the potential meaning of the images and therefore provided an analytic approach that could answer the third and fourth research questions. Although content analysis provided a way to quantify what is presented in the images, the thematic analysis allowed for a more interpretative reading of the images to identify potential motives for engaging in self-harm, to explore reasons why posters may utilise social media and to explore common themes of self-harm imagery across the three sites. This thematic analysis also allowed for a more interpretative engagement with ambiguous images to offer an analysis of what the images may mean, both for the poster and for the reader. It should be noted that this was particularly situated in my own experiences as a researcher, clinician and human being, who is interested in self-harm. Therefore, this thematic analysis should be read with this in mind with reference to Chapter Two.

The final research question was explored by engaging with the results and comparing across the chosen platform, alongside an exploration of the sites themselves to identify how the sites may have aided the understanding of the images captured and how they influence discourses about self-harm. The final research question was:

5. How do the image-sharing sites aid our understanding of how particular cultures or communities manage discourse about self-harm?

All three methodologies detailed provided a pragmatic way to answer the research questions in this exploratory study. They also linked together to provide comment on what images are presented on three different social media platforms, what meanings can be understood from these images, and what we could learn about how the sites may influence our understanding of self-harm.

Ethical issues with internet research

The internet is one of the most comprehensive collections of material, in all forms, that represents our world, people's lives, opinions, desires, thoughts and concerns and is, therefore, an attractive and fertile ground for research (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). However, it raises a host of ethical issues. The debates about research in this area are ongoing and cover many different topics (Enyon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008). Some guidelines are available (AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2012; British Psychological Society, 2013), which pose questions around respect for the dignity of the persons involved, scientific value, social responsibility and maximising benefits whilst minimising harm. But there is still considerable debate about the usefulness of static guidelines in a changing medium (Bassett & O'Riordan, 2002).

Internet research ethics, as all research ethics, are extremely important. There are documented cases of harm inflicted from internet research where researchers have been "lurking" on networking sites where people are not expecting to be observed (Berry, 2004).

Some authors argue that internet research presents no additional challenges to offline research and that the same guidelines can be applied (Rodham & Gavin, 2006). This argument holds some sway if one assumes that all internet research is placed within a human subject's model. Human subject research is any research or clinical investigation that involves human subjects. The three basic priciples of research that are absolutely fundamental within this model are confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). These tenets of research are reflected in the ethical debates around internet research about the public /privateness of internet sites, how to seek informed consent from a community and who can give that consent, and how to anonymise internet data so the source cannot be identified (Eynon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008).

Some scholars and more formal guidelines have posed certain questions and considerations that one should engage with in order to avoid harm to the human subject: What is the perceived privacy of a site? Is there a subscription? What is the number of

users? What are the group norms? How vulnerable are those posting on the internet? What is the potential harm? What does informed consent look like? How can researchers protect internet users? (Eysenbach & Till, 2001; AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2012).

However, there are other positions. Bassett and O'Riordan (2002) challenge the widespread application of the human subject's model in internet research and suggest researchers should consider the textuality of the internet alongside it existing as a space.

As detailed in the introduction, there is a conflict between understanding the internet as a "space" versus the internet as "text". There are ethical implications both to whether the internet is "space" or "text". The internet as a space and social domain has considerable face validity. However, assuming that any activity on the internet is social, positions "space" as the primary paradigm. Therefore, one would apply a human subject's model in all internet research to avoid harm. However, Bassett and O'Riordan (2002) argue that the textuality of the internet is then ignored. People choose to publish and create material on the internet for sharing purposes. They choose to share information which puts them in danger on alternative web and news sites, and share classified information, e.g. WikiLeaks. They argue that, if we apply the human subject's model indiscriminately, this could be unethical, and could also risk academic censorship of an alternative news agenda.

The space versus text debate raised interesting questions about my research, namely that people posting images are tagging them self-harm, or including self-harm in their text, presumably with the knowledge that this makes the posts traceable. Therefore, this could arguably be creating publications. The posters have also chosen not to restrict their images by making their accounts private, and, therefore, untraceable. In this instance, my ethical considerations were focussed on how to protect the posters' rights within that paradigm, and to protect their copyright. To this end, "fair dealing" applies where it is permissible to reproduce limited portions of copyright images for a non-commercial piece of research (HM Government, 2014), which this project is.

However, despite an argument being made for the protection of copyright, I was also aware that I needed to minimise any potential harm. The people posting images of self-harm could have been vulnerable, underage and at risk of harm. I needed to ensure that there were safeguards against this. I have identified how these were addressed in the method.

<u>Conclusion</u>

My research project was the first of its kind, to my knowledge, to explore self-harm imagery across different social media platforms. This is a new area of research, not building on a corpus of information about what is currently posted online across social media sites, so it required a methodological approach suited to this.

As described previously, visual research methods, although utilised across other disciplines such as anthropological and ethnographical studies, are an emerging methodological approach in the social and health sciences and do not, yet, have clearly defined procedures. As Karpf (2012) suggested, one must return to the research questions to find a solution that will meet those aims. The following chapter will present my method which was designed to meet the needs of the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

This study aimed to explore images posted on social media that were identified as representations of self-harm by the posters.

A three-stage design was chosen to meet the needs of the research questions. Stage one involved a visual content analysis to explore the content of the images. Stage two involved a thematic analysis to explore the meanings behind the posting. Stage three involved an analysis of each site and comparing results across platforms, to explore how they support/confine people to post in a certain way.

I made the decision to use both a visual content analysis and a thematic analysis to allow for a more robust reading of the images. A visual content analysis, although a robust analysis for cataloguing the explicit content of the image (e.g. gender of the person presented, colour of the image), does not provide an adequate analytic framework for engaging in a more detailed interpretative reading of the images. A thematic analysis, however, allows for a deeper and more interpretative reading of the images to identify any potential themes that would not easily be catalogued in the content analysis. An example of this would be an image of an adolescent female in grungy clothes, or ripped and dirty underwear. The content of this image would include the gender, whether self-harm was present, the colour of the image, and any obvious stated tone or purpose (i.e. if she looked sad or angry). Through the thematic analysis I would be able to theme this image as "subverted glamour", which includes an element of glamour often presented in the media but where that glamour had been subverted to offer a darker or alternate message to typically sexualised glamourous imagery. Consequently, the two analyses worked together, and added value to each other, to provide a broader interpretation of the images that was not just focussed on the explicit content, nor an interpretation of the underlying meaning.

This chapter will outline the procedure for the three stages.

Data collection

Sampling for sites

As detailed above, a scoping exercise was completed to identify which social media sites would be the most useful for this research project. This supported me to choose the following three social media sites to retrieve images: Tumblr, Twitter and Instagram. Tumblr and Instagram were chosen as they are two of the most popular social media sites whose focus is either on image sharing or known for predominantly sharing of images. Twitter was chosen as it is one of the most popular social media sites that allows for image sharing. This provided an interesting comparison of self-harm imagery.

Sampling for images

I chose to engage in a manual extraction of the 602 images from the three social media sites. Although I am aware of tools that can capture copious amounts of data from social media sites using the site APIs (Application Programming Interface), I chose to engage in a manual search and extraction using the search tools from the social media sites themselves. The main reason I did this was to develop familiarity with the site and also to develop familiarity with the images as I was viewing them. This decision was also made on the basis that 602 images is a relatively small number of images, so I did not require a more sophisticated way to catalogue the data. The other advantage to this was that I could decide, with each image, whether it fit the inclusion criteria. There are a number of limitations to manual extraction, which will be discussed, in further detail, in Chapter Six.

Through the search function of each site, I searched the term self-harm which produced all the results for Twitter and Tumblr. Instagram, however, have removed the ability to search or tag images as self-harm. Posters have identified ways to work around this, so they are able to still tag their images (Moreno, Ton, Selkie, & Evans, 2016). I looked to identify alternative search terms such as #self-harrrmmmm, and #selllff-harmmm. Variants of the words self-harm were used to gather the 202 images.

Images were collected on the 3rd August 2016 and the 30th September 2016. All the images that met the inclusion criteria were screen shot and saved to a file. 200 of the most recent images from each site were collected - 202 for Instagram. As this is an exploratory study, there is little research available in self-harm imagery on social media, so it was difficult to determine the size of the dataset. There is little guidance available on what would be a suitable number of images to include in research of this type. A published study in this field included 516 images from Flickr, in an analysis of self-injury content (Seko, 2013). As I was engaging in both a content and thematic analysis, I chose to go for a manageable number that could allow for exploration of variation across images with sufficient depth.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

In this study, I explored images that people posted to social media sites to see if they could offer a broader understanding of this behaviour. By pre-defining what self-harm was, using a clinical definition, or by using a visual approach, i.e. only analysing images that show direct self-harm, I would be dictating to those posting what images were valid to represent their self-harm. I would also have been restricting posters' visual expression. Therefore, for this study, my inclusion criteria were broad enough to capture how people

choose to represent self-harm in whatever visual form this took, and were not restricted by a pre-defined clinical definition of self-harm.

All images tagged with self-harm through the hashtag system (Wix, 2013) or through a tagging system within the social media site, or in the text attached to the image, were included.

All images were included that included text mentioning self-harm whether they included a reference to a method of self-harm, or a direct image of a self-harm act. This means that images relating to behaviours that sit outside the NICE definition (NICE, 2013) of self-harm such as body modification, eating disorders and substance misuse were also included in the data set. Additionally, images that bore no relation to self-harm were also included (e.g. landscape / self-portrait), thus supporting a broader understanding of how posters used images to represent their self-harm.

Exclusion criteria

The following content was excluded:

- Content posted from organisational, self-help or advice accounts, if obvious;
- Illegal content such as pornography.

Data Analysis

Stage One – Visual Content Analysis Procedure

Content analysis consists of five phases; defining the unit; compiling a code book; defining categories; encoding the material; and data analysis (Bock, Isermann, & Knieper, 2011).

The unit was defined as each single image. I developed an initial coding frame informed by the available literature and my research questions. In a study of photos of self-injury, Sternudd (2010) included the following in their coding frame: gender; body part; close up/distance; method of self-injury; colour saturation; and amount of scars. In a similar study of self-injury images, Seko (2013) included the following in their content analysis: parts of the body; condition of injuries; visual grammar (choice of subject / processing / techniques / distance); method of self-portrait; and point of view. In developing my coding frame, I utilised aspects of these coding frames to support me to build a frame that would provide an understanding of the content of the images viewed. I separated my coding frame into Image Characteristics, Photograph Characteristics, Text Images, Gender, Self-harm Characteristics, Method, Body Part, Severity and Colour. Within these categories there were individual codes (See Appendix Four). In addition I wanted to develop an idea of posters' stated emotional tone or stated purpose. To this end, I utilised a previous piece of research

exploring responses to self-injury in YouTube videos (Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010). The authors included Tone and Purpose within their coding frame. I chose to add these two categories to my coding frame: Stated Emotional Tone and Stated Purpose.

Once I had the basis of a coding frame, I then built upon this deductively as I was coding. I utilised a "best fit" framework (Carroll, Booth, & Rick, 2013), which allowed for flexibility in being able to adapt the coding for themes that do not fit into the pre-defined coding frame I had developed. I could adapt the pre-defined coding frame with new categories, which were representative of the data (Appendix Four). For example, whilst I was coding the category of Body Part I drew on the codes presented in Seko's (2013) study (arm, leg, torso etc) but then included "More Than One Place on The Body", as there were numerous images where more than one place was identified as being injured (e.g. arm and leg). Seko (2013) was only interested in self-injury, so I used More Than One Place on The Body to capture eating disorders. For the Stated Purpose and Stated Tone, I built these through an inductive process of analysing the images and noting down stated Tone or Purpose. These then provided the individual codes for these categories. I also included "Other" and/or "Uncertain" codes for those that were ambiguous in each category.

I analysed each site individually and looked at each image in turn. I noted down the characteristics from each picture into the coding frame using the image tag (i.e. TU31). Each image was analysed for each category.

Once a full site had been analysed for content, I was able to report on the number of each occurrence of characteristics. I then moved on to the next site. The percentage of each occurrence was then calculated for each site separately, and then for the sample as a whole.

The most challenging aspect of the content analysis was coding for Stated Purpose and Stated Tone as images can be read with many different meanings. However, this is a novel aspect to this study as previous research into self-harm imagery has not explored stated purpose or tone, to my knowledge. A credibility check was undertaken which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Stage Two – Thematic Analysis Procedure

There are seven stages in thematic analysis: familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes/approached with the research questions in mind; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Acknowledging that research is not a linear process, I was engaging in some level of thematising, as I was conducting the visual content analysis, as well as when I was extracting the data. However, by separating my analysis into a two-stage process, this

supported me to engage fully with the data on various levels and to ensure that I explored both the semantic and the latent meaning within the images.

As I am new to visual methodology and analysis, I sought to identify a framework to support me in this endeavour. I discovered a tool for the interpretation of journalistic photographs (Kedra, 2013; Kedra, 2015) (Table 1). This tool was used as a guide to support me in paying attention to various aspects of the visual image. As discussed, I had not previously engaged in any visual analysis prior to this study and found that by using this tool I was able to figure out what was meaningful in the image. It also helped me to develop a more interpretative understanding of the images. It should be noted that as this tool was not used as a coding frame, there were images where some of the questions posed by Kedra (2015) did not apply.

This tool supported me to engage in the latent themes in the images and to access the emotive functions. Self-harm is an emotive subject and having a topic guide for "reading" emotive images supported me in the analysis.

Table 1. A tool for the interpretations of journalistic photographs. (Kedra, 2015).

	Characteristic	**Examples and description**
1	Photo-content	Name, if possible, and describe the place and character(s) in the photograph, their appearance, dress, facial expression, sex, age, relationship, social status, nationality, religion, culture, and so on. What are the characters doing/were doing? What feelings their faces, behaviour, or appearance express?
2	Caption	Now read the caption to this photograph. What is your interpretation of this photograph now? Does the caption add new information for you?
3	Photo-techniques	Describe the background in which the characters are displayed, colours, shading, light, its type (natural/artificial) and source (sunlight, candle light, lamp etc.). What can you see in the foreground, and in the background, which elements are centred? What is the atmosphere of this photograph?
4	Emotions / feelings	What kinds of emotions and feelings this photograph raises in you? Describe them.
5	Function	Is there anything in the photograph that catches your attention? Explain.
6	Symbol and visual rhetorical figure	Are there any elements in the photograph which seem to symbolize something? Explain. Can you name and describe any visual rhetorical figures in the photograph?
7	Intertextuality	Look one more time at the photograph. Does it remind you of some other images, art, fil, other cultural artefacts, religious beliefs, or your own experiences? Please describe.
8	Photo-message	What message does this photograph carry? Is there any message?

Familiarisation with the data

Initially I looked at each image in turn without making any notes, as a way to become familiar with the data. I looked through the images twice before moving on to noting down my thoughts and responses to the image which were shaped by the Kedra (2015) tool.

Generating initial codes

I used the tool for interpreting images as a framework to begin note taking and used a separate page for each image. I looked at each image in turn and made notes under each of the headings, where possible. For an example of two completed note pages see Appendix Two.

At the end of each page I wrote words that were meaningful to me following analysing the image.

Searching for themes

Following the note-taking from each image I began to note initial themes, e.g. recovery. I would write these on the note pages.

Reviewing themes

Following an initial noting of themes, I began to rearrange the images into groups of themes that appeared to be related to each other, e.g. recovery and addiction. In doing this new themes emerged and I explored moving images into different themes. See Appendix Five for a diagram of how the images moved and changed over time.

At this point, I reviewed the themes with my thesis supervisors. We looked through the images in each theme and discussed each, and came to a shared consensus about how the themes were developing. These discussions included a direct observation on what was shown (i.e. the actual content), and a more free-flowing discursive discussion that included cultural references and feelings evoked. This was partly reflexive; these discussions also acted as a check against my particular focus and as a reminder to be more open.

The inclusion of how the themes developed over time, in Appendix Five, illustrates the analytic process, alongside the process of supervision. These supervisory discussions and immersion within the images supported the maturation of the thematic headings and groupings of images. By viewing how the themes developed over time the reader can view the transparent development of themes.

The final three stages of thematic analysis included: *Defining themes,* moving the images into appropriate thematic groups; *Naming themes, e*ach theme was then given a name and sub-themes; and *Producing the report,* which involved writing up each site. Once I had completed one site, I then moved onto the next.

I have included here a worked example of how I used the Kedra (2015) tool to support me to qualitatively pay attention to different aspects of the visual image.
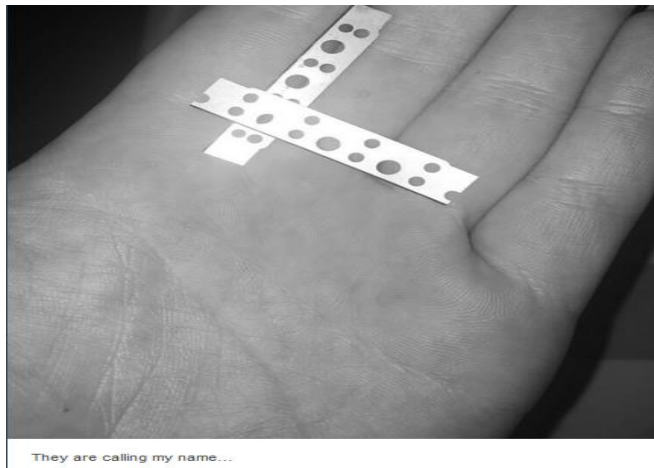
Figure 1. Image TU1

Table 2. Example of Kedra (2015) framework

	Characteristic	**Examples and description**
1	Photo-content	This image is of a hand, which is taken in close up (full fingers and thumb cannot be seen). The image is in black and white but one would guess that the hand is of a white person. The hand is holding two razor blades that have caught the light and look as if they are shining. The image on its own would suggest that the person is thinking about using the blades to engage in self-injury. It is possible they could be seeking support to stop or saying that they are not engaging in self-harm, by holding up the razors they may be denouncing this behaviour. There is no blood around the image.
2	Caption	The caption "They are calling my name" suggests that the poster is attracted to the objects held: the blades. The 'calling my name' suggests a longing and a desire to use them. The caption reinforces my interpretation of the message but places it in a frame of the person being drawn to self-injury, rather than looking to diminish or denounce it. The caption suggests there is a pull or draw to the blades that the poster may not be able to control as they are "calling to", rather than the caption stating: "I am drawn to".
3	Photo-techniques	The image is in black and white. This highlights the starkness of the blades, although one cannot tell how sharp they are the way the light reflects off the blades suggests that they are the focus of the image as they are centred (i.e. cannot see fingers or thumb but can see the blade). The atmosphere is intimate; it is a close-up of an object of desire.
4	Emotions / feelings	I feel like I am observing something private. The closeness of the image suggests that the poster wants us to experience their "draw" to this close-up. I feel that I am observing an intimate image (reinforced by the caption) and note that I want to understand the "draw" for them. It almost feels like the self-injury here is inevitable and that I am looking into a pre-window of their behaviour that they are about to do. In terms of emotions, I feel very aware of their intent to self-harm which evokes some feelings of empathy but mainly curiosity, as it

		raises ideas in me, clinically, to want to understand the "attraction" element.
5	Function	The blades capture my attention – they draw me in and do make me imagine the cuts that I have seen in other images of direct self-injury. There is something about the colour too that makes the image rawer. If the image was in colour, I may not be as drawn to the grey of the blade as I am in black and white.
6	Symbol and visual rhetorical figure	The blades symbolise self-injury. The offering them in the hand suggest supplication. The writing of "calling my name" evokes ideas of attraction and intimacy.
7	Intertextuality	It recalls images of actual self-injury, which makes me think about the preparation people go through prior to cutting - what is it in that preparation where I could intervene?
8	Photo-message	There is a message here that is reminiscent of addiction. The poster is being "drawn" to something, a behaviour they know to be illicit or deviant and yet it is "calling" them. It makes me think that this "calling" from the object needs to be addressed as a function of their behaviour.

Analysis across site

Initially, I analysed each site separately, so as not to confuse any emerging themes. Following each site analysis, I had a thematic map and write up for each site. Following the completion of this, I completed a cross-site analysis, which explored the similarities and differences across the three sites alongside any new themes. (See Appendix Five for thematic maps and how they developed over time.) In order to do this, I worked from post-its of each theme and sub-theme and worked to combine and re-cluster in ways that provided a narrative across the three sites. This provided a meaningful analysis of the ways in which the sites, and in essence, the communities posting on each site differed.

Stage three – Analysis of Site Procedure

Alongside both stages of data analysis of the images I engaged in a brief analysis of the platforms themselves, the way that they support or inhibit users to post images, and how their programming limits or supports the development of communities online who post about self-harm.

As discussed above, I began this project with a scoping exercise of social media sites. This involved reading news articles to understand the history of technological changes of the sites, how one posts onto each site, and the terms and conditions of each site to understand how sites restrict certain types of content. Some of this is detailed within the Methodology Chapter under Pen Portraits of Sites. This was a characterisation of each site, rather than a detailed analysis of the aesthetic and structural differences.

Although this is a not a robust methodological approach, in exploring the sites in greater depth in terms of their usability, it helped to add some understanding as to why a

poster might utilise certain sites over others. It is important to recognise that the findings for the final research questions are initial and tentative, as I did not undertake an exploration of all features of the platforms.

Reliability and validity

I am aware of the limitations of qualitative research, especially with a methodological approach that has been designed to pragmatically meet the needs of the study and answer the defined research questions, in an under-researched area. I am also aware that this research is subjective, as one could argue all qualitative research is. I am not presenting my analysis as an objective reflection of the content and meaning of self-harm imagery across social media sites; I am presenting my interpretative analysis of a snapshot of self-harm images which is filtered through a very individual lens.

The question of reliability and validity in qualitative data has been often debated. Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) produced evolving guidelines for qualitative research studies. These included: explicit content and purpose; appropriate methods; respect for participants; specification of methods; appropriate discussion; clarity of presentation; contribution to knowledge; owning one's perspective; situating the sample; grounding in examples; providing credibility checks; coherence; accomplishing general vs specific research tasks; and resonating with readers. I paid attention to each of these guidelines in completing this research and each is represented as much as possible within the write-up. For example, a typical credibility check would be to share findings and themes with the data sources, however that would not be possible within this study. Some researchers have trained additional coders (Thelwall, et al., 2015) or employed a single coder reliability check, where a randomly chosen set of images is coded again after a sufficient time.

In relation to the reliability and validity of my Content Analysis, I trained an additional coder in the coding frame. This involved me explaining each category and codes within this and providing examples of images from within each code. The additional coder re-coded 10% (60) of images in total. This included 20 images from each social media site. Once the additional coder had completed their analysis, I used an open source Reliability Calculator to determine intercoder reliability coefficients (Freelon, 2010). Intercoder agreement is important, as it measures the extent to which different coders assign the same rating to each object (Tinsley & Weiss, 2000).

There is no consensus on which mathematical measure should be used to calculate and report intercoder reliability (Li, 2015). There is also no consensus on what would be appropriate levels of agreement for research, however it is suggested that .90 or greater is acceptable to all, .80 or greater acceptable in most situations but below this there is

disagreement (Neuendorf, 2002). However, it should be noted that .70 is often used for exploratory research.

I used Scott's Pi, as this coefficient is appropriate to use for two coders using nominal categories (Joyce, 2013; Scott, 1955). The table below provides the results.

Table 3. Results from Intercoder Reliability

	Instagram	**Tumblr**	**Twitter**
Scott's pi	0.9	0.9	0.8

All results were found to be above what is appropriate results for exploratory research.

In relation to the reliability and validity of my thematic analysis, I initially analysed nine images, three from each site. My supervisors also analysed the same nine images. We then met to explore how we had used the Kedra (2015) framework and any emerging thoughts about this small sample. Following the analysis of each site, I engaged in ongoing supervision, as discussed above, where we explored emerging themes and had a free-flowing discussion of how the images fit within the specified themes.

Decision making over time

As has been noted, visual research methods, although growing in popularity in social sciences, do not have clear structured guidelines for how they should be conducted. This meant that alongside researching all available options for how I could conduct visual research, the method itself was adapted over the course of the development of this project.

Initially, I imagined that I would be analysing the images alone, without the context of the accompanying text. However, researchers have warned against the use of the visual in isolation, or removed from their context (Frith, Riley, Archer, & Gleeson, 2005) because this removes the meaning from the context in which it was produced. Thus, I made the decision to analyse the images alone in the content analysis, as this met the requirement for the first two research questions. However, I chose to analyse the images alongside their text in the thematic analysis. This offered the possibility of providing an analysis of the content of the images presented and yet provided a broader reading of the images within their context when engaging in the thematic analysis.

As detailed above, I also sought to identify tools to support me to analyse the images (Kedra, 2015). This tool supported me to "read" the images more fully and pay attention to more aspects of the image, including the emotion that they provoked, and to give a more detailed analysis of the images.

These changes were an iterative response to developing a method that needed to be adapted to meet the needs of the project. All changes were detailed in my reflexivity journal.

Ethical considerations

This research was subject to the University of Leeds ethical procedures. Ethical approval was granted by The University of Leeds SOMREC committee (Appendix One).

As noted in the earlier discussion around internet ethics previously, there is an argument to be made that images posted onto social media are publications. However, recognising that my responsibilities are also to minimise any potential harm, I followed the AOIR (2012) guidelines for ethical practice in internet research.

Terms of service

The terms of service from each social media site were explored to ensure that research on the sites was not explicitly restricted. All sites noted that although content posted was owned by the poster, once posted then each site is granted permission to use any content available anywhere in the world. The terms of service also note that users can make their content private (Twitter, 2016; Instagram, 2013; Tumblr, 2016).

Are the sites public or private spaces?

Eysenbach and Till (2001) suggested a number of ways to identify whether the site is viewed as more public or private. These considerations include whether there is a registration process, what the membership size is and what the group norms are.

Although each site requires a registration to use the functions, it is a minimal registration process, email and name. As detailed in their terms of use, all three sites can use the content posted in any way they like, although they acknowledge that the content is owned by the poster. All three sites are searchable without signing in and a simple google search will present data from the three sites.

As discussed, Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr are all viewed as some of the largest social media sites on the internet. Therefore, it is assumed that these sites are deemed less private by those using them.

Anonymity

The posters of each image are not identifiable. Each image was screenshot and saved to a document using a coding system that identified the site and the number of image, i.e. TU31 (Tumblr image 31). Any information about the poster has been removed from the screenshot by drawing over it or by cropping their username out of the image. Additionally, any other poster that is detailed on the image has been removed in the same way. For

images that contain recognisable self-portraits, if the image was used in the published report, it was blacked out so it is unrecognisable, as detailed in the ethics form. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that anyone would be able to identify an individual from the images posted in any publication from this research.

Consent

All images used in this research were publicly available, therefore no consent was sought from the posters of the images. Although I logged in to each social media site to improve functionality of searching, I did not click on any poster's profile. There are ways, on all three sites used, where posters could have restricted their content to those who follow them. Images that were not direct access would be unable to be searched using the search function. Therefore, implicit consent was assumed for material that is freely accessible to all and that anyone could find on the internet.

Data protection and storage

Once images had been saved, the file was password protected and then held on the University of Leeds encrypted server which only I was able to access. When sharing images with research supervisors to prepare for discussion, files were password protected. All data in the finished publication is completely anonymised.

Risk management plan

A risk management plan was devised to ensure there was a process to manage any distress from viewing potentially upsetting material. This is detailed in Appendix Three.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

In this chapter, I have presented the results from the Visual Content Analysis followed by the results from the Thematic Analysis of each individual site. Finally, the results from the cross-site analysis are presented.

Visual Content Analysis

A total of 602 images were analysed across the three sites. The results will be presented in sections depicting each category.

Table 4. Image Characteristics

	Tumblr	Instagram	Twitter	All sites
	N=200 (%)	N=202 (%)	N=200 (%)	N=602 (%)
Type of Image				
Photograph	56 (28)	90 (44.6)	57 (28.5)	203 (33.7)
Photograph Collage	21 (10.5)	1 (0.5)	19 (9.5)	41 (6.8)
Drawing	36 (18)	22 (10.9)	28 (14)	86 (14.3)
Collage of images	5 (2.5)	1 (0.5)	4 (2)	10 (1.7)
Text image	45 (22.5)	51 (25.2)	34 (17)	130 (21.6)
Mixed text and picture	37 (18.5)	37 (18.3)	58 (29)	132 (21.9)

The largest proportion of image type were photographs (33.7%) across all sites, followed jointly by text images and mixed text and picture images (both 21.6%). Text-only images are images where text was the only thing portrayed, on a plain background. Mixed text and picture images included a picture background with text over the top. This also included images which are shared news reports, with an attached article title. This did not include drawings that included writing in the drawing, as they were coded as part of the drawing.

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, there was a higher percentage of photographs on Instagram (44.6%) compared to Twitter and Tumblr (28.5% and 28% respectively) as Instagram is first and foremost a photo-sharing platform. On Twitter, there was a higher percentage of mixed text and picture images than on Instagram and Tumblr, which probably speaks to the purpose of the sites themselves, with Twitter, perhaps, being used more for information-sharing and text-based information.

It is interesting that each site contained drawings, although there were more drawings presented on Tumblr, followed by Twitter and then Instagram. However, clearly drawings were used across all sites to represent self-harm.

Table 5. Photograph Characteristics

	Tumblr	Instagram	Twitter	All Sites
	N=200 (%)	N=202 (%)	N=200 (%)	N=602 (%)
Photograph Characteristics				
Selfie	46 (23)	46 (22.8)	24 (12)	116 (19.3)
Person pictures	15 (7.5)	4 (2)	38 (19)	57 (9.5)
Photograph of objects	8 (4)	15 (7.4)	14 (7)	37 (6.1)
Famous / Celebrity Image	6 (3)	4 (2)	6 (3)	16 (2.7)
Close up	28 (14)	38 (18.8)	46 (23)	112 (18.6)
Landscape	7 (3.5)	15 (7.4)	2 (1)	24 (4)
Not photograph	90 (45)	80 (39.6)	70 (35)	240 (39.9)

Less than half of all images were not photographs across the three sites (39.9%), which meant they were other types of image (e.g. drawing). Tumblr had a higher proportion of different types of images, with 45% of images not being photographs.

Instagram and Tumblr had a higher proportion of selfies than Twitter (23% compared to 12%). Selfies are defined as a photograph that is taken by oneself with oneself in the image. This can also include reflections in mirrors (See Appendix Four). Interestingly, Twitter had a higher proportion of images that were close-ups of body parts (23%) compared to Tumblr (14%) and Instagram (18.8%). Close-up photographs were photographs of close-up body parts, i.e. close-up of skin. I found this a surprising result and would have expected more close-ups of skin to be represented on Instagram.

What was striking from these first two categories is the range of types of images that were used to represent self-harm.

Table 6. Text Images

	Tumblr	Instagram	Twitter	All
	N=200 (%)	N=202 (%)	N=200 (%)	N=602 (%)
Text Images				
Positive Text Image	7 (3.5)	18 (8.9)	30 (15)	55 (9.1)
Negative Text Image	61 (30.5)	60 (29.7)	38 (19)	159 (26.4)
Ambiguous Text Image	29 (14.5)	25 (12.4)	48 (24)	102 (16.9)
Not text image	103 (51.5)	99 (49)	84 (42)	286 (47.5)

Instagram and Tumblr both had a higher representation of negative text images in their samples (Tumblr 30.5% and Instagram 29.7%), whereas Twitter had much more of a spread across positive (15%), negative (19%) and ambiguous (24%) text images, again

suggesting differences possibly between Twitter as an information-sharing platform, compared to Tumblr and Instagram. Negative text images were images where the text had a clear negative purpose. This could be where the text stated "I am depressed" or "I am fat". This also included negative statements about the world or others, such as "no-one loves a suicidal girl". Positive text images included text that clearly stated a positive message, i.e. "I feel happy today". They also included inspirational messages, such as "you'll get better". Therefore, the results indicated that both Instagram and Tumblr presented more negative images than Twitter.

It should be noted that drawn images that contained text were also categorised as positive, negative or ambiguous, even though they have not been categorised as a "text image" or "mixed text and picture" in Image Characteristics.

Just under half of all images in the sample contained no text in the image (47.5%).

Table 7. Gender

	Tumblr N=200 (%)	Instagram N=202 (%)	Twitter N=200 (%)	All N=602 (%)
Gender				
Male	18 (9)	12 (5.9)	27 (13.5)	57 (9.5)
Female	82 (41)	69 (34.2)	48 (24)	199 (33.1)
Ambiguous gender	20 (10)	4 (2)	17 (8.5)	41 (6.8)
Unidentified gender	17 (8.5)	29 (14.4)	39 (19.5)	85 (14.1)
Person not represented	60 (30)	86 (42.6)	58 (29)	204 (33.9)
Mixed gender images	3 (1.5)	2 (1)	11 (5.5)	16 (2.7)

What was striking in terms of gender was the much higher proportion of females presented in images than males (33.1% across all sites compared to 9.5%). This was particularly apparent on Tumblr where 41% of the images contained a female, and Instagram where 34.2% contained a female. The highest proportion of males was on Twitter (13.5%). This was even more striking when it was considered 33.9% of the total sample did not contain a person at all.

Twenty images on Tumblr, and seventeen on Twitter, presented a character with an ambiguous gender. This included images of drawn characters that were androgynous, where a gender could not be identified, and also images that included possible male and female body parts. As it was difficult to distinguish whether a drawn image could be representing a transgender person, the classification of 'Ambiguous' was used. This also included drawn images of characters (i.e. a standing rabbit), where a gender was not determined.

The following table presents the results from all of the self-harm categories to enable clearer reporting.

Table 8. Self-harm characteristics

	Tumblr N=200 (%)	Instagram N=202 (%)	Twitter N= 200	All N= 602
Self-harm Characteristics				
Self-Harm				
Present	104 (52)	96 (47.5)	78 (39)	278 (46.2)
Absent	96 (48)	106 (52.5)	122 (61)	324 (53.8)
Method of Self-Harm				
Cutting	63 (31.5)	54 (26.7)	49 (24.5)	166 (27.6)
Scratching	11 (5.5)	8 (4)	13 (6.5)	32 (5.3)
Punching	1 (0.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.2)
Bruising	1 (0.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.2)
Burning	2 (1)	1 (0.5)	0 (0)	3 (0.5)
Alcohol	1 (0.5)	2 (1)	1 (0.5)	4 (0.7)
Substance	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)	6 (1)
Eating Disorder	7 (3.5)	9 (4.5)	2 (1)	18 (3)
Suicide	1 (0.5)	8 (4)	2 (1)	11 (1.8)
Mixed method self-harm	7 (3.5)	6 (3)	4 (2)	17 (2.8)
Not Identified	104 (52)	114 (56.4)	129 (64.5)	347 (57.6)
Body Part				
Head	4 (2)	0 (0)	2 (1)	6 (1)
Arm	28 (14)	27 (13.4)	42 (21)	97 (16.1)
Leg	12 (6)	13 (6.4)	4 (2)	29 (4.8)
Hip	2 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0.3)
Torso	1 (0.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.2)
Breast area	1 (0.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0.2)
More than one place on the body	32 (16)	14 (6.9)	12 (6)	58 (9.6)
Not Identified	120 (60)	148 (73.3)	140 (70)	408 (67.8)
Severity of Self-Injury				
Severe self-injury	13 (6.5)	11 (5.4)	13 (6.5)	37 (6.1)
Moderate self-injury	34 (17)	23 (11.4)	16 (8)	73 (12.1)
Superficial self-injury	19 (9.5)	11 (5.4)	11 (5.5)	41 (6.8)
Scar	3 (1.5)	6 (3)	7 (3.5)	16 (2.7)
Bandaged	4 (2)	3 (1.5)	2 (1)	9 (1.5)
Not Identified	127 (63.5)	148 (73.3)	151 (75.5)	426 (70.8

Present self-harm included images that showed self-harm directly (e.g. a cut arm, emaciated body), and indirectly but inferred (e.g. statements saying "I have cut" or objects

such as a compass, tablets, and alcohol). This did not include images that discussed self-harm but did not infer that it was about directly engaging in the act (e.g. text that attempts to prevent people from self-harming "please do not cut"). Self-harm was absent in just over half of the total sample across the three sites (53.8%). The absence was more noticeable in Twitter, with 61% of images not containing self-harm. However, in Tumblr, just over half of the images did contain self-harm (52%).

In terms of method, cutting was represented more than any other method of self-harm across all three sites, with 27.6% of the sample showing or describing cutting. This was followed by scratching, at 5.3% of the total sample. Cutting included images where the skin had clearly been cut, or images of objects that were used to cut (i.e. a knife or scissors), and images where the text stated that the poster was cutting ("I just cut"). Scratching included images where it appeared the skin was scratched, rather than cut, or where the poster stated they scratched. However, in just over half of all the images, the method of self-harm was not identified or self-harm was not reported (57.6% of the total sample). This included posts stating that the poster engaged in self-harm but did not state how and by what method.

Interestingly, Tumblr and Instagram had a higher representation of eating disorders than Twitter (3.5% and 4.5% compared to 1% respectively). Eating disorders included images of thin bodies, text stating the person had an eating disorder or where they state they were bingeing, purging or restricting their eating. This suggested that people used Instagram and Tumblr more to present thin bodies and eating difficulties.

Linking to method, the arm was represented across all sites as the predominant location of self-injury (16.1% closely followed by more than one place on the body 9.6%). Putting these two results together, there appears to be more self-injury represented across the sites - the method of this tends to be cutting and it is generally the arm that is shown. Injury to the breast area was only present on Tumblr (0.5%), which may suggest differences in acceptability of more intimate imagery on Tumblr. Although, with only one image presented in the Tumblr sample, one cannot draw any conclusions from this. Tumblr also had a higher proportion of harm to more than one part of the body (16%) compared to Instagram (6.9%) and Twitter (6%). This linked with the higher percentage of eating disorders on Tumblr (7%), although this was not as high as Instagram. This also suggested that, in Tumblr, alongside eating disorders, there were many images where more than one place on the body was cut.

Although most images did not present a way to assess the severity of self-harm (70.8), when this was possible, moderate self-injury was represented the most across all three sites (12.1%). There was a similar mix across sites of severe and moderate self-injury. Tumblr, however, had a higher representation of superficial self-injury (9.5%) compared to

Instagram (5.4%) and Twitter (5.5%). This may speak to the acceptability across sites on how "severe" an injury it is acceptable to post. Taking severity, body part and method together, cutting to the arm was the predominant method and body part shown and most of the cuts were of moderate severity.

The following table presents the results from the novel aspect to this study: Stated Purpose and Stated Emotional Tone.

Table 9. Stated message characteristics

	Tumblr N=200 (%)	Instagram N=202 (%)	Twitter N=200 (%)	All N=602 (%)
Stated Purpose				
Inform others	9 (4.5)	1 (0.5)	27 (13.5)	37 (6.1)
Reach out	7 (3.5)	9 (4.5)	17 (8.5)	33 (5.5)
Share recovery	1 (0.5)	2 (1)	10 (5)	13 (2.2)
Inspire	2 (1)	8 (4)	6 (3)	16 (2.7)
Reasons why and function	11 (5.5)	9 (4.5)	3 (1.5)	23 (3.8)
Discouraging self-harm	1 (0.5)	2 (1)	8 (4)	11 (1.8)
Share feelings	38 (19)	17 (8.4)	28 (14)	83 (13.8)
Share weight loss / thinness	11 (5.5)	5 (2.5)	4 (2)	20 (3.3)
Share joke	1 (0.5)	4 (2)	6 (3)	11 (1.8)
To identify with others	2 (1)	5 (2.5)	4 (2)	11 (1.8)
Uncertain	117 (58.5)	140 (69.3)	87 (43.5)	276 (45.8)
Stated emotional tone				
Anger	6 (3)	2 (1)	18 (9)	26 (4.3)
Sadness	36 (18)	29 (14.4)	12 (6)	77 (12.8)
Hope	7 (3.5)	13 (6.4)	15 (7.5)	35 (5.8)
Feeling alone	10 (5)	7 (3.5)	0 (0)	17 (2.8)
Overwhelmed	7 (3.5)	7 (3.5)	6 (3)	20 (3.3)
Pride	4 (2)	2 (1)	2 (1)	8 (1.3)
Afraid	0 (0)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.3)
Happy	4 (2)	1 (0.5)	23 (11.5)	8 (1.3)
Uncertain	126 (63)	137 (67.8)	123 (61.5)	386 (64.1)

Stated Purpose and Stated Emotional Tone were the most difficult categories to code. Across the sample, 45.8% of the Stated Purpose were uncertain and 64.1% of the Stated Emotional Tone were uncertain. This speaks to the difficulty of ascertaining the purpose of the poster, without being able to ask the poster themselves why they were posting a certain image. In terms of emotional tone, this also speaks to the difficulty in being certain of the emotional tone of images, which may have multiple meanings, purposes and ambiguous messages.

When the purpose was coded, sharing feelings was represented the most across all sites (13.8% of the total sample), although this was much higher in Tumblr (19%) and Twitter (14%) compared to Instagram (8.4%). An example of this was a picture of a female with the text stating "save me from myself so I don't drown", suggesting the poster is wanting to let people know that they were distressed. Interestingly, and linking with the earlier discussion about the differences in Twitter as a platform, the second most commonly-stated purpose on Twitter was to inform others (13.5%). This is much higher than either Instagram (0.5%) or Tumblr (4.5%) which potentially is consistent with the use of Twitter as an information sharing platform. Interestingly, Twitter was also used to discourage self-harm (4%) more than Instagram (1%) or Tumblr (0.5%). Finally, sharing weight loss or thinness (e.g. pictures of thin bodies, before and after pictures of weight loss) was represented more on Tumblr (5.5%), suggesting that this platform may be more likely to present images of thin bodies, which links with earlier results on method of self-harm and links to the higher proportion of eating disorder images.

Only 23% of the total sample provided clear information about the reasons for or the function of self-harm. These included images where posters stated the reason for engaging in self-harm, for example text images which stated; "I cut to prove you're not the only person that can hurt me", or "I feel a sense of calm" (after self-harm). This was a surprising result as I expected there to be more messages describing the cause of self-harm.

In terms of Stated Emotional Tone, unsurprisingly, across all sites, sadness was the most commonly-stated emotional tone (12.8% of the total sample). However, this was more apparent on Tumblr (18%) and Instagram (14.4%) than on Twitter (6%). Sadness included images where the poster explicitly stated that they were sad, or images where there was a sense of sadness (e.g. a character or person crying).

Anger was represented much more on Twitter (9%) than on Tumblr (3%) or Instagram (1%). A tone of anger included images that stated the poster was angry or where a character or person appeared angry. Similarly, happy was also represented much more on Twitter (11.5%) than on Tumblr (2%) or Instagram (0.5%). This suggested that more positive messages were seen on Twitter than on Instagram and Tumblr.

Feeling overwhelmed, however, was represented in similar numbers across all three sites (Tumblr 3.5%, Instagram 3.5% and Twitter 3%). A tone of feeling overwhelmed included images where a character looked like they were significantly distressed (i.e. screaming) or when a statement suggested a poster could not cope any more, e.g. "no more thoughts".

Interestingly, given the concerns discussed in the introduction, no images were analysed which appeared to directly encourage others to self-harm.

Table 10. Colour

	Tumblr **N=200** **(%)**	**Instagram** **N=202** **(%)**	**Twitter** **N=200** **(%)**	**All** **N=602** **(%)**
Colour				
Colour	119 (59.5)	85 (42.1)	166 (83)	370 (61.5)
Black and White	81 (40.5)	117 (57.9)	34 (17)	232 (38.5)

Finally, there was a higher proportion of colour images across all the sites (61.5%), although, there was a higher number of black and white images on Instagram (57.9%) than on Tumblr (40.5%) or Twitter (17%).

Instagram Thematic Analysis

Five themes are presented from Instagram, namely: The Language of Addiction; Motivation; Identity; Gender; and Body Image.

Theme One: The Language of Addiction

This theme described images and messages relating to self-harm being described using terminology that fit with the language of addiction. This was significant as it provided an understanding of how posters viewed their self-harm as addictive, something they felt compelled to do rather than making a choice to, and something they needed to recover from or overcome.

Sub-themes within this included: Recovery; Compulsion and Control; and Relapse. This theme framed self-harm as something external to the person, something that is happening "to them" rather than having the agency to choose.

Recovery

There was a common theme around recovery messages in the data. This subtheme included images which presented healed scars that told stories of recovery, images that presented an alternative life now people no longer engaged in self-harm and images that presented a transformation from self-harm to positive mental health.

I196

Image I196 articulates this sub-theme; it is very explicit in its use of addiction and recovery terminology. It is an image of the number of days that the poster has been "clean". Clean often relates to the use of drugs although in this context it appears to be used to

denote days free from self-harm with #cutting and #self-harm as hashtag markers of this. There are also hashtags relating to other mental health diagnoses suggesting the poster is connecting this image to a variety of difficulties. Interestingly, the recovery message of 60 days clean is juxtaposed with the background scenery which although could be described as peaceful, is also devoid of people or any signs of life. The image appears to be lonely. The quote by Alexandre Dumas also presents the idea of loneliness and empty space with a message about "lonely happiness". The poster also thanks those who have helped them to achieve their recovery. Therefore, the purpose of this image appears to be not only to share their recovery but to highlight to others how well they are doing, as well as to provide a platform to thank those who have been involved, using a public forum to offer thanks. This suggests this post is a way to communicate with a particular group online, or with those that follow them. In posting this image they are using social media to memorialise their recovery. The caption evokes a positive emotion as the poster positions themselves as recovered and offers messages of hope and yet the image itself and the quote used suggest a touch of sadness and bleakness presenting the image as not entirely positive. Perhaps recovery is a lonely place to be despite ending a behaviour that is maladaptive. This could potentially link with a later theme of 'Identity'. This poster may experience some sadness that they are no longer part of a community that identifies as different.

Compulsion and Control

This sub-theme described posters losing control or indeed steadfastly attempting to remain in control by using controlled cutting. This is a sub-theme of addiction as it denotes the sense of being "addicted" to something and trying to not give into the compulsive urge to self-harm. The majority of images in this theme presented self-injury with text suggesting that the poster was feeling out of control which is why they have cut, with comments such as "I couldn't stop" or "just really needed to hurt myself".

I54

Image I54 articulates this. It is a black and white image of skin with several cuts. There is no sign of bleeding. Taken on its own the image presents a starkness to the cuts. They are completely centred and it is difficult to tell what body part they are from. The text accompanying the image states "I can't stop". When looking at the picture again it can be read that there are so many cuts because they could not regain control, it describes a sense of compulsion to cut, shown by the amount of cuts in the image. However, at the same time the cuts appear to be very controlled, they are in neat lines and almost like the person has drawn on their skin. Thus in writing they "can't stop" it is suggesting that the poster feels out of control and yet they are also paying meticulous detail to their self-injury. Patterning of this nature presents a sense of control, as contrasting to the frenzied cutting seen in other self-injury images. The grayscale of this image shows the cuts to be stark and bleak; although the viewer knows the cuts will be the colour red, the grayscale mutes the image and provides some distance from the reality. The image evokes sadness and a sense of hopelessness that I feel is driven by the caption "I can't stop" which alongside presenting an element of distress there is also a sense of helplessness from the poster.

I201

Image I201 above is explicit in stating an addiction and compulsion. This image is of some material that looks like it has been used to wipe blood from cuts, perhaps a tissue. There are no parts of a body on show, but the image suggests that the poster is wanting others to view the effects of their self-injurious behaviour. The text states "Why can't I stop this addiction". This suggests they are unable to control the urge of cutting. They also include "why me" which is a childlike statement that can be interpreted as "whiny" and used to evoke feelings of pity. There is an element of helplessness to this caption. The intended function here appears to elicit empathy from others and yet my initial response was a thought of a tissue being used to clean a scraped knee. It was only when looking closer at the image that the small lines in blood suggest it has been used to clean up multiple cuts that I had a more empathic reaction. The use of "why me" also suggests that this is being done "to them" rather than being done "by them", underscoring the role of compulsion.

Relapse

The final sub-theme is where posters have described relapsing, and using language relating to addiction to discuss engaging in self-harm behaviour again. This is significant in that it again links to the metaphor posters are using of addiction language, framing self-harm as an addictive behaviour that will be a continual struggle to remain "clean" from. Images in this theme present messages of frustration and upset that posters have "succumbed" again to self-harm.

I120

I145

Images I120 and I145 capture the message of this subtheme. Image I120 is a text based image that states "it sucks because I was getting better and now I'm not". Although difficult to determine, I would suggest that the poster has copied this image and presented it suggesting that they find the words meaningful to them and the words articulate their feelings. The words themselves look like they have been written in pencil and are quite harsh on the page suggesting the writer is pressing down and angry or frustrated. The words are completely centred and take up the whole image as if it is intended that the reader should be overwhelmed by the text. The text itself suggests that the meaning for the poster is that they are no longer recovering but rather have relapsed into a behaviour, or way of thinking, they were trying to stop. There is no caption attached to this image but a number of hashtags including #idiot, #worthless and #pafetic (sic) suggesting that the poster is using

the hashtags to underscore their emotions and the way they are feeling. By writing #worthless it reinforces the message that this is what the poster feels and perhaps this contributes to their ability to recover.

Image I145 on its own presents a cut arm which is holding a dog's paw. There appear to be tissues under the arm which could suggest the poster has been trying to clean their cuts. The image itself is dark suggesting the poster did not want to present the harshness of the cuts but rather to allude to them. The cuts do not appear to be the only focus of the image as there are so many other aspects presented. Coupled with dark tones the cuts fade into the background. The caption explicitly references relapses. This text suggests this is not the first time they have "relapsed" and engaged in self-injury after a period of "recovery". Therefore, the poster is using this image to let others know that they have again cut themselves. The hand in the image captures my attention as it appears to be holding a dog's paw, which could suggest that the dog is a source of comfort for the poster. The dog's paw appears to be anchoring them.

Both images portray a sense of helplessness in attempts to recover from what they see as their addiction. And yet, the photograph evokes more emotion in me than the text as there is more of a connection to the poster. I believe in both of these images the intended message is to let others know that they have slipped and are again engaging in self-injury. Therefore they are wanting to elicit attention or care from others either through their statement of relapsing or through their use of self-critical comments (i.e. #idiot #worthless).

Theme Two: Motivation

This theme described apparent motivations for engaging in self-harmful behaviours. This theme included images that appeared to present reasons why posters were engaging in self-harm or why they were posting images to describe how they are feeling. This is significant as it provided an insight into potential motivations for engaging in self-harm.

Subthemes within this include: Feeling Overwhelmed; Sense of Self; and Coping Behaviours.

Feeling Overwhelmed

There is a common theme in the data where posters present messages about feeling overwhelmed or expressing a view that they are struggling with their thoughts and feelings.

This could suggest that a motivation for engaging in self-harm is that people felt so overwhelmed they needed a release. All of the images appeared to be copied images or quotes rather than photographs. This suggests that the messages the poster wanted to convey may have been difficult to capture in a photograph, thus people were searching images that

captured their feelings. The use of 'others'' images or 'borrowed' words could be because the posters did not feel able to describe their own experiences, or that they found solace in others' words because they identified with them. There was also the possibility that posters felt too exposed or vulnerable to use their own words so were relying on others. There was a strong element of one's thoughts being too overpowering in this sub-theme.

I121

Image I121 illustrates a sense of hiding from something. The drawn figure has his arms wrapped round his body, with their head down as if they are hiding away from their own mind, cocooned from the outside world. The text in the image suggests that the character is feeling overwhelmed by their thoughts. The caption reads "I just do" suggesting that the poster identifies with this image and wants to find a way to quiet their mind in order to free themselves from their thoughts. There are also hashtags relating to depression and suicide, alongside self-harm, suggesting that they are struggling with their mental health and are using the hashtags to reinforce their difficulties. The hashtags suggest what their thoughts might be and include #sad, #alone, and #lonely. These hashtags could be the thoughts that the poster is hiding from. Similarly, alongside hiding from them, the poster is using this image in a public forum and thus publicising them which highlights how social media can be used to express "hidden thoughts", presenting a vulnerability to others.

The grayscale of the image exacerbates its bleakness and the larger font size on the word "STOP" in the image presents the scale of the problem. There is a sadness in this image and I feel drawn to the poster who is using this cowering image. The character wants to hide away and I want to help them to uncover their arms. The drawing is reminiscent of dark comic drawings. The message lets us know that the poster is struggling with their

thoughts and wants to shut out the outside world, this also gives us an idea that their thoughts may be the cause of their self-harm behaviour.

I can't take a pill without thinking about overdosing.
I cant cross a street without wanting to jump in front of a car.
I can't shave without wanting to slit my wrists.
I can't walk along high things without wanting to jump.
Every moment, every aspect, every vision of my life is changed by this depression and it's killing me. It's made me weak and vulnerable and these thoughts are winning

Follow

15 likes   7h

#killme #anxiety #help
#alone #suicidal #depressed #anorexia
#selfharm #scars #suicide

♡ Add a comment...   ○○○

I130

Image I130 illustrates just how pervasive depressive thinking can be for this poster, using text that suggests in every movement they are thinking about ways to hurt themselves. This is an emotional message which highlights just how difficult everyday activities can be if you are having depressive thoughts. Every mundane activity (i.e. taking a pill for a headache) leads them to have thoughts about suicide. The final words of the text suggests that they are losing the battle as the 'thoughts are winning' as they are too powerful. There is no caption to this image but there are hashtags relating to mental health difficulties suggesting that they are using the hashtags to present their feelings. The black and white image is stark and clear, the words are in bold which underline the intent of the message. The emotion projected from this message is despair, suggesting the poster is completely overwhelmed by their experiences. Although there is no caption to this image, I have an emotive response from the obvious despair that is presented in the text. Everything feels too much and there's a hopelessness, and perhaps a helplessness that I am feeling for them. I interpret the function to be to express their despair to others to elicit a response.

Sense of Self

The second subtheme described images that focused on relationships as a potential motivating factor for self-harm. However, importantly, the meaning of the images suggested that difficulties in relationships led to a low sense of self in the poster. Images described how relationships caused pain, and how the pain caused by relationships can lead to self-harm, but more importantly, how relationship difficulties can lead to a feeling of inadequacy. This is significant as this sub-theme described how a person's feelings about

themselves can influence their self-harm behaviour, and that these feelings were influenced by interpersonal relationships.

Images within this theme included posters describing hurting themselves because they have been hurt by others. By hurting themselves, it showed that they could do just as much damage as someone else can, and by self-harming they are taking control of their body and making right the pain that was done to them. In doing this they were giving a physical voice to their feelings of betrayal and sadness and turning their anger inwards.

I34

Image I34 shows a black and white drawn image of a woman with text overlaid stating that being disappointed by the person you thought would never hurt you actually hurts the most, suggesting that when you let your guard down to others and put your trust in them you do not expect to be caused pain. However letting your guard down makes you more vulnerable. The caption states that the poster hates "him", presumably an ex-partner, for still having a hold over them. This image may be conveying a message that in hurting the self they can alleviate the hurt that someone else has caused. The face of the woman is conventionally attractive, she has large watery eyes and appears as if she is about to cry. The image evokes feelings of empathy. It reminds me of experiences where I or people I know have been hurt by others. It is also a very exposing message describing interpersonal pain which is difficult to explore. It makes me think about the function of this image; the poster is using text to present their shock and disappointment at being hurt when they were vulnerable and yet they were also presenting their vulnerabilities to the world. It makes me wonder if the "him" the poster refers to is the person that the image is intended for. The intended function therefore could be to let the person know how they have made the poster feel, which is underscored by the emotional hashtags such as #Ican'tdothisanymore and #suicide attempt, thus suggesting that this emotional pain has affected their sense of self and how they are able to cope.

Coping Behaviours

The final sub-theme of 'Coping Behaviours' described a range of ways that people coped with stressors. This was significant as it provided some insight into how posters were coping with their experiences. Images in this theme included messages about how substances were used as a way to "forget" and to cope with distress. Numerous posters described hurting themselves as a way to cope and manage internal pain. They described creating pain on their body as a way to cope with the pain that they could not reach or heal on the inside. Other images described how self-harm was used to cope with feelings of low self-worth, with comments such as "never good enough" and "I screw everything up" being used to describe why posters were engaging in self-harm.

I128

Image I128 is a colour picture of an arm resting on a leg with numerous cuts. They are not bleeding so the cuts have either been cleaned or were superficial. On its own it is displaying what looks like quite a recent experience of self-injury, however, when looking at the accompanying caption the poster describes the motivations behind their self-injury as feeling stressed out. Thus self-injury is a coping mechanism when the poster is feeling stressed and overwhelmed. This caption adds a deeper meaning to the image with the poster presenting their cuts as a way to represent their motivation. This image does not provoke strong emotion in me. The injury appears superficial and the poster appears to want others to know what they have done to themselves, possibly to receive some support. I interpret this lack of emotion to be both related to the relaxed pose and the superficiality of the cuts. Perhaps the relaxed pose in the image makes me feel as if the poster is not in as much emotional pain as posters in other images where the cuts are more centred and stark. In terms of the superficiality, I wonder whether my lack of emotional response is a reflection of more significant self-injury in other images I have seen and on the skin of people I have

worked with. The caption also suggests that there is a function there to bring attention to others that they are now being stopped from going near knives.
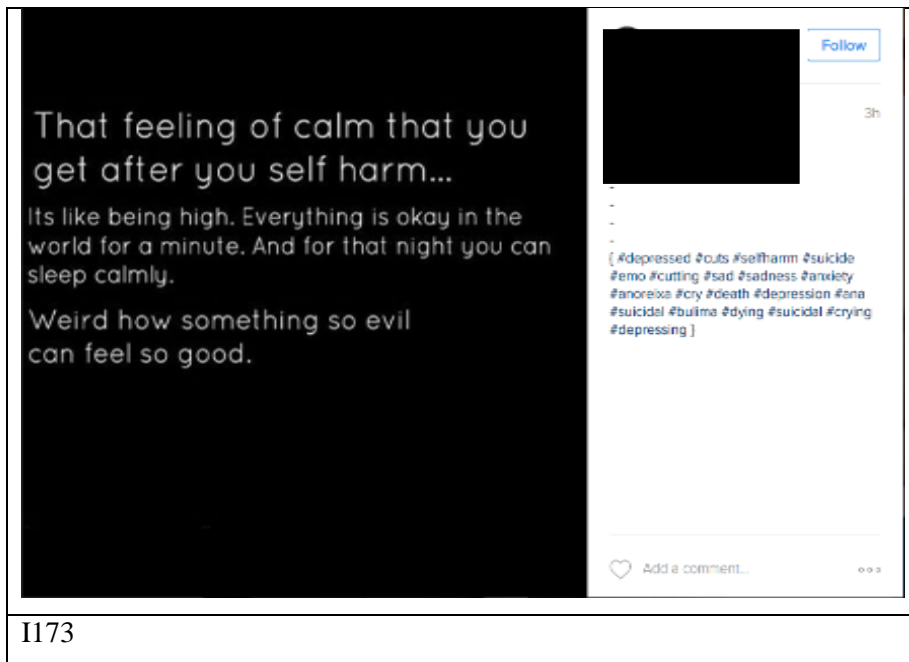
I173

The final image to represent this theme, I173, highlights not a motivating factor or a coping strategy, but rather a positive feeling that a person may experience following self-harm. The text in this image describes a feeling of calm after self-harming and this helps a person to sleep soundly. Although not alluding to why they are engaging in self-harm this image represents how engaging in self-harm may self-perpetuate due to the calm feeling the poster experiences afterwards. The text describes self-harm as "evil" suggesting they know the behaviour is maladaptive and yet it feels good, it helps them to cope with the reasons they self-harm, and it allows them to feel a release allowing them to sleep. The hashtags underline the message of the image describing mental health difficulties and presenting feelings of the poster alongside #emo linking to a sub-culture or community. This image is significant as it describes a positive function of self-harm as opposed to other images which present the negative functions or motivations (i.e. escape from thoughts) but do not present a sense of what the positive feeling is that people achieve when they engage in it.

Theme Three: Identity

This theme described images that related to posters' sense of identity, what communities they felt connected to and how wanted to be viewed by others. This included the sub-themes of 'Sub-Culture' and 'Belonging'. This theme is important as it provides an idea of what groups' posters may want to identify with and how this was linked with their social media presence.

Sub-Culture

This sub-theme described a theme of "ownership" or "belonging" to a particular culture. A 'Sub-Culture' is described as having beliefs or behaviours at variance from main groups within a culture or society. These images presented a sense that posters knew that they were part of something that was alternative to the norm and separate from others and there was a sense of pride to this. Images in this theme presented messages suggesting those who self-harm were part of a counter-culture; examples included referencing the drawing of lines as only recognisable to those who self-harm alongside hashtags referencing alternative groups such as #emo and #indie.

welcome to our society,
where the teenagers are depressed,
and the students are stressed,
where people will give you hate,
on what you wear and what's your weight,
where there's only sex, no hugs,
and there is no candy, just drugs,
where we cut for an escape,
and the parents beat and rape,
where laws forbid people being gay,
and everything is weary and gray,
so I hope you enjoy your visit with society,
just try not to get depression and anxiety.

I180

Image I180 depicts this sub-theme. It presents a poem that describes an alternative society; where "teenagers are depressed", and where "we cut for an escape". This poem not only describes motivations for engaging in self-harm but positions people with difficulties as separate from those who do not. This identifies a sub-culture of people, living in view of "normal society" but different from it. There is no caption but hashtags describing self-harm and depression. An alternative interpretation of this image is that it is presented as an indictment of society where people get mental health difficulties "because" of the state of the world. I believe the use of "where we cut for an escape" suggests that the poster places themselves as part of that "we" and part of that society. I am drawn to the lips on the image which are a vibrant colour and are slightly open. The lips remind me of Rocky Horror Picture Show and suggest an element of sexuality which when looking at the texts link only to the middle lines "where there's only sex, no hugs". The lips also remind me of vampire imagery, where I would be expecting to see fangs and dripping blood. The message of this image is that those who self-harm, or experience mental health difficulties, are different to

the "norm" and are part of a "sub-culture" that has different views and behaviours than others. I believe that the intention of the poster here is to position themselves as part of this "deviant" group that has been traumatised by the actions of others.

<u>Belonging</u>

Closely linked to 'Sub-Culture' the second sub-theme, 'Belonging', described a set of images that suggested people who were self-harming identified with each other. These images positioned "the public" as not understanding them and only being understood by others who engaged in the same behaviour. Images in this sub-theme also presented a reclaiming of the negative words that have been used about those who self-harm. For example, one image described how a person who engaged in self-harm was "stupid, ugly, cuts herself". The poster then identified with these words and stood in defiance against the negative words used against them. The following two images have articulated this sub-theme.

I165

I170

Image I165 represents a joke about self-harm. Drawing with silver appears to denote cutting with a blade and the colour turning to red denotes blood. The use of the word "magic" is positioned as a dark joke. The accompanying text is a reaching out message to let

the community know that the poster is new. The caption suggests that they have chosen this image as an introduction, they want to dialogue with others who understand the meaning of the image and have similar experiences. By saying "hi guys" it is suggesting that there are "guys" to be found in a community. Which could suggest that the tags used are intended for others to identify them, as well as representing their feelings and behaviour. They are also being quite playful with language, suggesting that their intention is to make others smile and entice them to engage. Rather than presenting a more depressing or sad image, they have chosen one which they think people will be more likely to respond. Their caption also states "no-one cares I know" which evokes feelings of pity, as if the poster believes that they will be ignored.

Image I170 is a checklist of behaviours, many of which are negative (been bullied/purged/cut myself). There are circles next to each behaviour to tick if you have done them. This image appears to me as a way of signalling that they belong, similar to an initiation or entrance exam, that if you have engaged in lots of these maladaptive, and non-normative behaviours then you can join too. Some of the behaviours detailed in the image are marked, using more red than others, suggesting that perhaps they are more emotive. These include abuse, behaviours relating to self-harm and substances. The marking of the behaviours in red resembles blood, which could underline the link with self-harm. The meaning of this message is the poster identifying as being part of a deviant group with others who are presenting with similar behaviour. The title of the image #Things I have done project suggest this could be a way posters find others who they feel a sense of belonging with and feel connected to. The intention here is also to position the poster outside of a society that values self-improvement "to do" lists rather than deviant lists. In terms of intertextuality I read this and think of other more popular lists of "have you ever" that are seen on internet sites like Buzzfeed.

Theme Four: Gender

There was an overwhelming representation of females in the data, as noted in the content analysis. This representation can be seen across the images in the other themes also, however it is significant to detail as a separate theme as the ubiquity of the female form is noted across the data set.

I have chosen two images to depict the two subthemes within gender that highlighted the nuances of images of the female form that are presented throughout the data set. The two subthemes are: Subverted Glamour; and Sexualised. However, this theme is also closely linked to the final theme of 'Body Image'.

Subverted Glamour

This theme described images that depicted sexualised images that have been subverted. That is where an image contained a sexual element that did not conform to what is typically portrayed in the media. This was significant as it portrayed females who did not conform to a commonly held view of what females should be and how they should be presented, particularly on social media. Some images in this sub-theme were reminiscent of some lesbian photography where gay women are depicted in sportswear underwear.

I47

Image I47 depicts a young woman in underwear and a shirt that is open. Her face is showing and she is looking directly to the camera. The girl in the picture has dreadlocks and is wearing what could be deemed as "boyish underwear". This image points to gender non-conformity. It is sexualised as she has moved her shirt to expose her chest area, but also it is subverted because she is wearing a crop-top and does not conform in other ways to what could be described as traditionally sexualised in white, heterosexual, western culture. I am drawn to her face as she is cocking her eyebrow as if she is responding to something someone has said. The caption adds little understanding to why she has positioned herself in that way *"what did you say about my little alien…one day I will have a little alien to say that about".* This could suggest she is posting in order to communicate with others, which is reflected in her facial expression. Thus her posing in that way could be intended to entice others in. Equally, by presenting herself in underwear she could be looking to attract others in a sexual way, or to gain sexual gratification. Hashtags include #secretsociety123 which could suggest that she is looking to link in with others aware of the way that hashtag is used.

It is an intriguing image, the hashtags reference mental health difficulties and emotions and yet her face is playful and engaging.

Sexualised

Alternative to 'Subverted Glamour' there were numerous images in the data set that appeared to be outwardly and purposefully sexualised in a way that fits with mainstream white western culture. Messages in this sub-theme included images that appeared to be explicitly sexual, both relating to how female bodies were posed and in relation to accompanying text, with two images referencing sado-masochistic sexual practices and dominant / submissive practices.

I158

Image I158 does not portray self-harm but a female body lying on a bed in her underwear. The person is anonymous with only the body showing from the chest to the thighs. The image itself is alluring and sexual and in terms of intertextuality it reminds me of images on the front of romance novels and erotica. This image seems to conflict with the text attached which discusses the poster's parents finding out about their self-harm and eating difficulties leading to arranging appointments, presumably mental health appointments. The caption goes on to say "I feel like absolute shit and didn't even bother with my makeup today". Hashtags include #goals, #beautiful and #pretty, suggesting that the poster is using the sexualised image to describe how they would want to look, which may be affecting their eating. This image evokes empathy in me as it describes the pressures placed on women, which appear to be experienced by this poster in their wish to look like the image. I interpret the poster as hoping others will respond with empathy. I also wonder

whether the poster is using this image, perhaps not of themselves, as they feel that their body should not be represented on social media, which could speak to the culture of social media and what is or is not acceptable to show in terms of the body.

Theme Five: Body Image

This theme described common messages of "thinness" in images tagged as self-harm. Subthemes within this included: The Thin Body and Idealised Control. This theme relates to the theme of Gender as the majority of images represented within Body Image are of the females.

The Thin Body

This subtheme represented images of thinness. Posters were positioning their bodies and posting to Instagram to share either their weight loss or the shape of their thin bodies.

These images also related to embodiment. Posters were presenting their bodies to represent something about their experience, showing what they have been able to do to their bodies by making them thin and that with the thinness they have changed their body to represent their inner needs or desires. Alternatively, they could be posting images of thinness to present their achievements in losing weight or to remind themselves of their goals, thus using Instagram to diarise their thinness. Some of the images in this theme suggest an element of pride in the way the posters are sharing their bodies.

| I131 | I25 |

The images above articulate this theme. They portray thin bodies with their faces anonymised. Image I131 is a black and white image showing a female standing in front of a

bathroom. She has pulled her top up and rolled her leggings down so her whole torso is showing. She is very thin and her ribs are protruding. It appears that this image is a display or a "look what I've been able to do", almost using the post to memorialise their weight, or weight loss. The hashtags linked to this image are #anxiety, #depression and #anorexia alongside #suicide and #self-harm. There are no other captions, which makes me think the poster believes the image speaks for itself. There is no ambiguity here; she is merely presenting their thinness. There is also a toilet visible in the background which could suggest that the poster has been purging. There is a sense of pride in this image. Although it is presenting a body, it is not presenting it in a sexual way as other images have, but rather as a way to share their thinness. I feel sad when I look at this image as the girl appears really fragile. I think the starkness of the black and white colour also makes her appear thinner. I believe the intended function is to make others, who have similar difficulties, envious of their efforts in weight loss. There does not appear to be a counter message of "this is the reality of weight loss and restricting" and that it is harmful but rather it is presented as a celebration.

Similarly image I25 relates to thinness. A female seems to have set up a camera to capture a shot of her legs, she has pulled her t-shirt up to show her placing her hands around her thighs, showing that her thighs are thin enough for both hands to encase one. Hashtags relate to mental health difficulties alongside counter culture tags such as #emo and #bmth (Bring me the Horizon, an emo band), but there is no other caption. Although the shot looks staged it appears that the room behind her, probably a bedroom, is messy, which speaks to the voyeuristic nature of looking at images. She is presenting her legs and yet there is an intimacy in how she is doing this in her bedroom, with her personal belongings surrounding her. In terms of evoked emotion I do not feel as sad when looking at this image. I wonder if this is due to the fact that she is wearing clothes and so the reality of her thinness is somehow muted. There is also an interesting juxtaposition with the cartoon t-shirt that she has chosen to wear, perhaps removing some of the seriousness of the image and presenting herself in a childlike way.

These images suggest that the posters are wanting others to view their thin form, either as a way to celebrate or to hold themselves to account. There is a sense of pride shown in each image which is typical of images in this theme, and a sense that the intended message is for others to feel envious or want to achieve their results.

In these images the heads have been cropped out, suggesting an implied level of anonymity that is conflicting with the presentation of the body. Bodies in these images are fully exposed and on display and yet the posters faces are not, suggesting it is OK to display one's body but not one's identity.

Idealised Control

This subtheme described images which related to weight control and appeared to be providing direction or instruction to either the poster or to others in how to manage their weight and their body. This is significant as it related to messages on social media generally about weight and idealised bodies, but here posters were linking this to self-harm, which provided a broader understanding of how posters were viewing self-harming behaviour.

Images in this sub-theme included pictures of scales and weight charts suggesting posters were attempting to meet an unrealistic weight target and articulating annoyance that they were unable to do this.

Two images have been chosen to represent this theme, the first image I52 is a drawing that encompasses societal messages about weight, whereas the second I164 relates to self-worth in relation to body image.
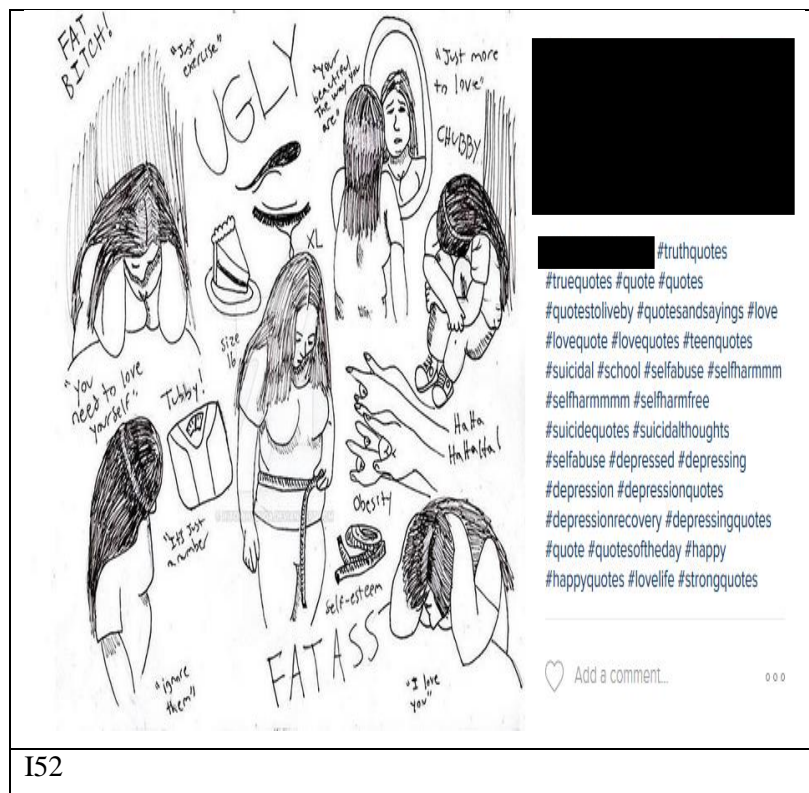
I52

Image I52 is a collage of drawings relating to weight and being bullied. There are images drawn of a girl cowering from the words 'CHUBBY', 'UGLY' and 'FAT BITCH'. There are drawings of hands pointing at her as if mocking her. There are countering messages too, such as "you need to love yourself" and "I love you" but these seem small in comparison to the harsh words. There is no caption to this image other than numerous tags in relation to mental health, self-harm and suicide. There are also a number of tags including #quotes which suggest that this post is aiming to be searchable to others. Although a drawn image, this evokes feelings of sadness as it represents bullying. Images in this theme suggest that if you are not an ideal weight then you should diet, and if you are overweight then you

will be targeted for this until you lose weight and fit in with the idealised image of what a woman should be. The harsh bullying words and the images of the scales and tape measure suggest that the intended function of the image is to position a person as weak if they are not able to control their weight. I am interested in the middle drawing of the female as she is not particularly overweight, which makes me think about what is a healthy weight and how that differs from a weight that is presented as idealised by society. In terms of intertextuality I have observed positive posters where a person is in the centre and they are surrounded by loving and kind words; this image appears to be the antithesis of that.
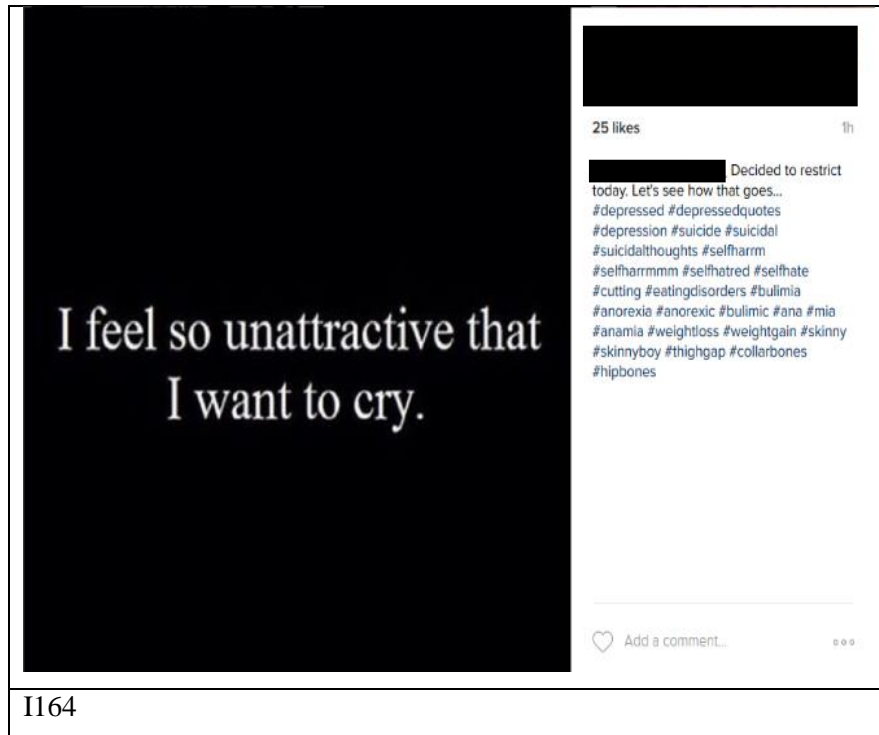
I164

Images I164 is a statement about feeling unattractive and not fitting in with an idealised norm. The text states "I feel so unattractive". This is an interesting statement because the text is not saying I "am" unattractive but rather this feeling of not being good enough is causing them distress. The text attached to image I164 underscores this by the poster stating that they are going to restrict today. This suggests that due to feeling so unattractive they are going to restrict their eating. This adds a deeper understanding to the image which suggests that they feel unattractive because of their body weight. Interestingly the poster has used this text, presumably text they have found, to represent their feelings instead of an image. It is possible that, in using text, they are perhaps reinforcing a belief that their body does not fit into what they believe is socially acceptable on social media, or that they feel too unattractive to represent their pain with an image of themselves.

<u>Tumblr Thematic Analysis</u>

Four themes are presented from Tumblr, namely: Gender; The Language of Addiction; Articulated Distress; and Drawing Self-harm.

<u>Theme One: Gender</u>

There is an overwhelming representation of the female form on Tumblr. As noted in the content analysis, Tumblr had the highest percentage of females represented in images across the three social media sites. Gender is significant as it provides the reader with an insight into how posters utilised female bodies to represent their self-harm and to represent themselves.

Subthemes within this include: Sexualised Idealised Form; and Subverted Glamour.

<u>Sexualised Idealised Form</u>

This sub-theme described a range of images, which presented females who were posed in sexualised ways. All of the images within this sub-theme were of females who would be described as having "typically" attractive bodies (in white, heterosexual, western culture). They were all thin young white women. The images within this sub-theme are reminiscent of images typically observed on social media in terms of celebrity images. Images within this theme included photographs of legs in stockings and legs in long socks suggesting possibly a fetishistic element. Images also showed what could be stock or copied images of thin attractive females including women in their underwear. In one particular image a woman is seen lying on the bed with her top pulled up in Calvin Klein underwear. The caption to this image stated "been lying in bed all day and cannot sit still" which could suggest that the image was of the poster but it appeared to be a copied image of a marketing campaign. This suggests that some posters were looking for idealised bodies to represent them visually.
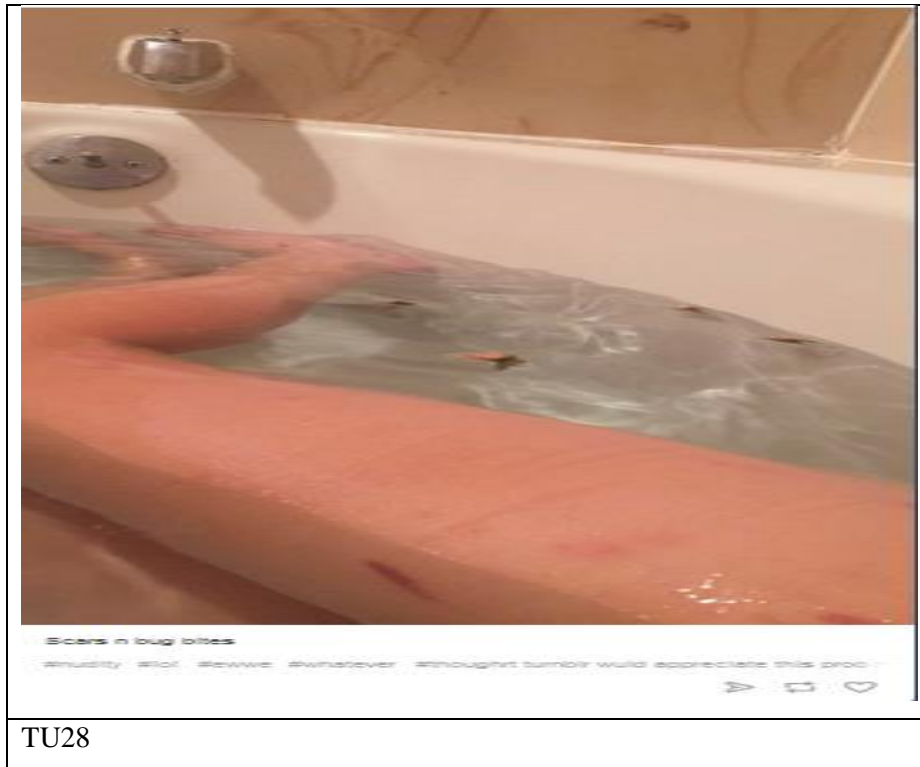
TU28

Image TU28 is typical of images in this theme. The image presents a female lying in her bath, showing the top of her thighs to her feet and the bottom of the bathtub. The person in the image is a white woman. It appears as if she has posed her legs in order to take what could be described as a more sensual shot. She appears relaxed and yet perhaps this pose would not be comfortable in the bath which suggests it is staged for the photograph. There appear to be scars on the top of her thigh, a red mark that could be a more recent scar and a red blotch. There are also some flower petals in the bath adding to the sensuality of the image. The caption states "scars n bug bites" suggesting the purpose is to present the marks on her legs. Although the colours in the image are muted and soft it appears that the lighting is from a light above, possibly the bathroom light. The marks on the leg are centred suggesting they are the focus and yet I am drawn to the whole of the image. I do not feel any strong emotions when looking at this image. I am slightly irritated and wonder whether this is related to how the poster is choosing to present themselves. This could also be a response to the superficiality of the self-harm observed. There is a performance here where the poster is choosing a sexualised way to present themselves using the subtext of self-harm. The irritation may be in relation to the idea that this devalues others experience of self-harm. However, the intimacy of the image captures my attention. It is a sexual image and the female is posed to evoke sexuality. However, it feels insincere and overt. They have positioned themselves in this way to present their body, which feels less about them presenting their cuts. In terms of intertextuality, images like this appear to be ubiquitous on social media. I have seen similar poses across different social media captured by celebrities. Clearly the difference here is that the poster is presenting scars from their self-harm. This is

a sexualised image of an attractive body which is posed to provoke intimacy. The interesting message in this image is that the poster (presumably the female in the bath) is presenting their scars, and therefore their experience of self-harm in a sexualised way. The intimate nature of the image could be a way to draw attention from the "dirty" act of self-harm, or to lessen the impact. Therefore they are using their idealised and sexualised body to provide distance from their behaviour and presenting an incongruity between a relaxed sexual body and one that has been injured.

people have always told me to paint with red instead of self harming which I never tried because it honestly sounds pointless but I tried it after hitting an all time low and it actually helped.
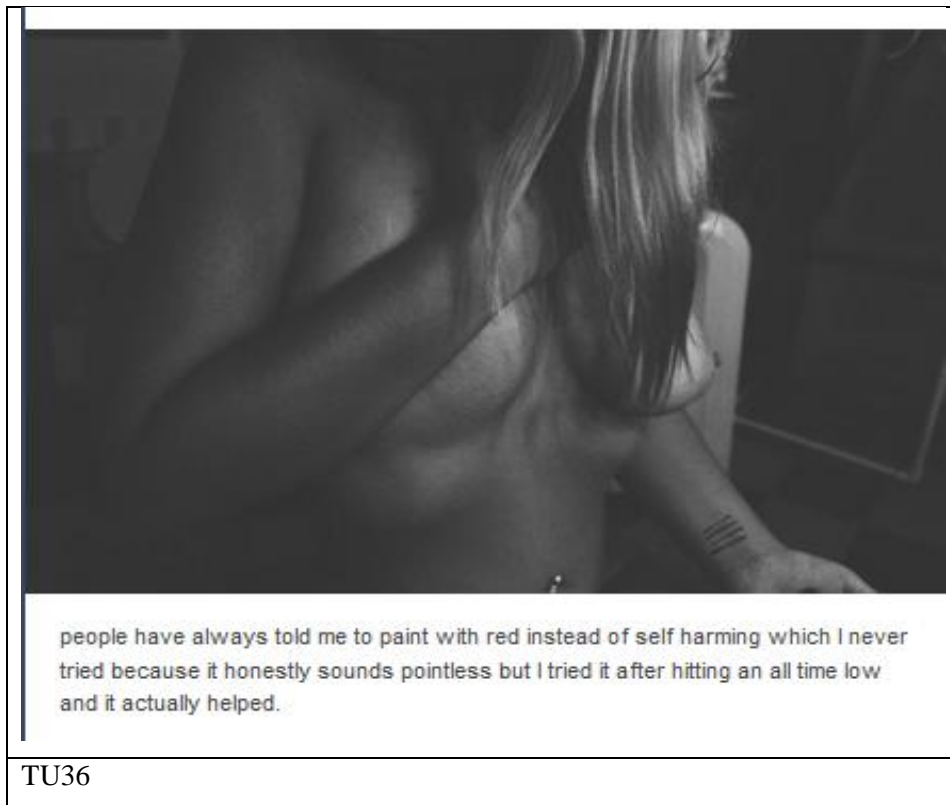
TU36

Within this sub-theme there were a number of images where females were shown presenting their breasts, albeit with their nipples covered. Image TU36 is typical of these range of images and yet the poster here has decided to present their naked breast. Image TU36 presents a female showing the top of her torso with her face covered by her hair. In this image the female's arm is covering one breast and her hair is covering her face while her other breast is on show. The image alone suggests that she has cut her left wrist, which is shown the furthest from the camera. The caption however provides new information suggesting that she has drawn on her left wrist as a way of preventing her from harming herself. The image in black and white appears quite "artistic". The poster is positioned in a way that presents her body. It is not the wrist that is centred but rather her breasts. The atmosphere is relaxed, although it appears that the poster has spent time setting this shot up, which links to their performance and the way in which they are wanting to present themselves. Again, similarly to TU28 image above, my initial response to this image is to question why the poster would choose to present their body in this way to portray their

substitution behaviour. I then wonder how much of my response is caught up in how I present myself on social media and judgements I may make on others presenting themselves in certain ways.

The poster here is presenting a sexualised and attractive image as a way to represent their non-engagement of self-harm. I interpret that they are wanting others to feel attracted to them and their body, to feel as if they are viewing something private and illicit. Also to provoke feelings of wanting to respond and reach out to them. The poster is using their gender and their body as a way to provoke feelings in others.

Subverted Glamour

This theme describes sexualised images which have been subverted. This means they appeared sexual in nature but did not fit what might be typically portrayed in the media as "sexy" or attractive. This is interesting as it suggests that some females on Tumblr are presenting themselves in ways which challenge the stereotypical view of what constitutes "sexy" and they are doing this in a variety of ways. These two sub-themes link together and are significant as they both present images of the female form that are sexualised and yet present them in very different ways. The fact that there are numerous images like these on Tumblr suggests that this is a social media space where the presenting of female form is accepted and supported.

Images that are subverted in this theme include images where the female body is shown and yet it is shown in old, dirty, or non-sexy underwear. Images within this sub-theme also present female bodies where clothing has been torn away and is dirty. These images are qualitatively different than those that are captured in the previous sub-theme. Here women are presented in sexual poses or in poses that reveal a lot of the female body, and yet they are presented in ways that would not typically be thought of as a "sexy" way to portray a body. This is interesting as it could be argued that women are reclaiming how their bodies are presented usually and presenting them in a way in which they do not need to conform to others views of them. It could also be argued that female bodies that show self-injury are also subverting glamour as they are causing destruction to the glamorous object. The conflicting ways in which the self-harm is presented on the female form would be an interesting phenomenon to explore further.
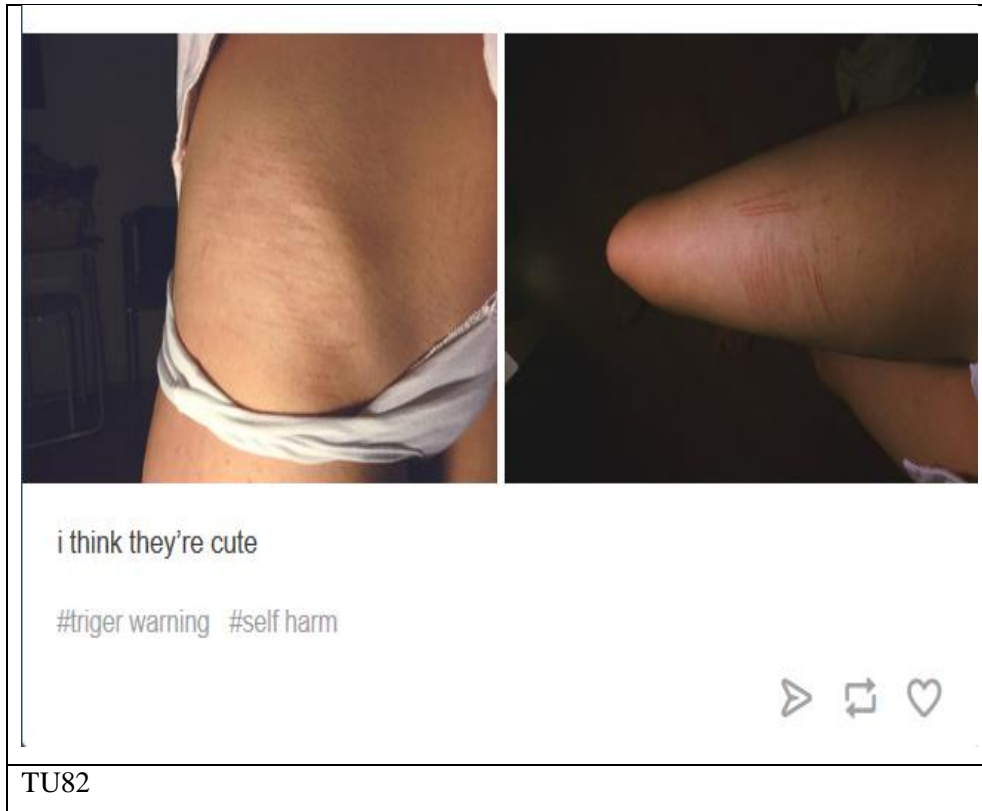
TU82

Image TU82 shows a photograph collage of images of a female body. The image on the left displays a top pulled up and underwear pulled down showing small cuts to a protruding hip. The second image shows legs crossed with small cuts on the top of the leg. What is interesting in this first image is the clothing appears to be old and worn. The clothing chosen is not what would be typically seen in images of females in their underwear on social media. The knickers look loose-fitting and there appears to be a rip in them. The images on their own suggest that the poster is wanting to present their injury. However, the caption adds another level of meaning stating "I think they're cute". This caption suggests that the poster was presenting their cuts with some pride. However, by capturing more of her body than just the superficial cuts she is also presenting herself in this old and worn clothing. There is an element of sexuality to this image due to the way she is almost exposing her body pushing the focus away from the cuts.

Throughout the viewing of images in this sub-theme I was drawn to understand the reasons why posters are presenting their cuts in ways that place the focus of their gender and bodies in the forefront. I interpret the meaning of this image to be the poster presenting their body in a subverted way and using their cuts as a way to do this.

Theme Two: The Language of Addiction

This theme described images and messages relating to self-harm described using terminology that fitted with the language of addiction. This was a significant theme within

Tumblr due to the number of images that were depicting messages that related to addiction. This is significant as it provided a deeper understanding about how people who engage in self-harm view their behaviour, which will in turn support clinical work.

Sub-themes within this include: Compulsion; Recovery; and Memorialising.

In framing self-harm using the language of addiction the posters were suggesting that self-harm is something they were in the midst of, that it was happening to them and they were struggling to stop it, rather than it being a behaviour they choose or have agency in.

Compulsion

This subtheme related to messages of compulsion. The images in this theme suggested posters felt compelled to cut or were "called" by their self-harm. There was a sense of longing in these images. The images included posters who had cut early in the morning and then commented that cutting was the first thing they did, like a cigarette in the morning for those addicted to nicotine. Images also included photographs of objects such as razor blades presenting them as attractive objects that held power over the poster.

I want at least this much back, so much.
This wasn't even the best of it.
My last night at college before I withdrew on medical leave...it was from the top of my shoulder down to about 1 inch above my wrist around ¾ of my arm...
i fucking want it. I heal too fucking fast; everything fading.
I will fix it. Maybe not today or tomorrow or even next week or month...but I will.
Don't even get me started on how skinny I was...there's a reason I've been limiting myself.

#self harm   #scars   #cutting

TU170

Image TU170 represents this subtheme. It shows a black and white image of an exposed arm. There are cuts to the top part of the arm. They do not look recent as they are not bleeding, however, it is difficult to tell as the image is black and white. The accompanying text states that the poster wants "at least much cutting back". They also state "I heal too fucking fast" and that "I will fix it". The text in this image suggests that they are compelled to cut again to achieve the same look, as if they are annoyed that they have healed. The caption adds new meaning as it places the image in history. Similar to images

that people share of when they were thinner this image is reminiscent of that longing for the past. The caption suggests an attraction to how they used to be. I felt quite distressed when looking at this image. Not because of the image itself, although I am interested in the patterning of the cuts, but more because of the desire apparent from the text. The image evokes sadness in me that someone is looking back on an image of self-injury and aiming to achieve that again. This suggests that there is something about the cutting which is functional in itself, which they are focussing on, rather than the reason they may be cutting in the first place. I interpret that the poster would want others to be shocked when viewing their image, that others would then be able to see just how "messed up" they are even without the current scars. The compulsion in this message is that they feel compelled to achieve a look that they previously had. The language used, in particular the profanity, underlies this and informs the reader how much they desire this.

Recovery

This sub-theme described images used to signify pride in their recovery. This is important as it places people's understanding of stopping self-harm as something to be "recovered" from and to celebrate when it is over. This also sits in contrast to *compulsion* which describes a hopeless draw to self-harm. Again this is significant in aiding understanding of how people discuss previous self-harm but also to how services can work clinically. There were two kinds of images which dominated this sub-theme. The first kind of images were photographs of the body, usually in a mirror and usually with some text to suggest how happy the person was in those images now than they had been previously. The second kind of image was close ups of happy, smiling faces. Typically, these images showed a person smiling and letting the viewer know that their life had changed now they no longer self-harmed. This second kind of image presented a message that was celebratory in nature. They presented an alternative life where they were presenting themselves as "better" and wanting people to know how good their life is, and perhaps also to feel inspired or feel envious.

On the left is a girl who wanted to die. On the right is a girl who wants to live. On the left, I was stuck in the deepest pits of my disorder. I was constantly in a binge/restrict cycle, I was self-harming, was emotionally unstable, and found myself doing endless amounts of cardio. I hated myself and punished myself in so many ways. I still remember when I took this photo. I cried in the dressing room.

Fast forward to now, I am the happiest and healthiest I've ever been. I can lift heavier weights, jog farther distances, I have more energy, I achieved many goals, and I still have goals to look forward to. I no longer self-harm, my binge eating has decreased, I no longer restrict, and most important of all, I want to live. I still have work to do, but that is all part of the journey. Slow progress is better than none.

This transformation photo doesn't speak a drastic difference in my body. However, to share how far I've come means the world to me and I can't wait to continue improving myself for the better.

I'm so happy to be part of such a supportive community. You all have taught me that hard work pays off and that life is a beautiful thing. I want to provide that same inspiration back... because you - yes you reading this, have made some sort of positive impact on my journey.

#transformation tuesday   #fitblr   #recovery is beautiful   #crushfam   #bbgprog

81 notes

TU71

Image TU71 is a photograph collage showing two selfies of what one assumes is the same girl. Both images show the girl from the shins up and the head is cut off in each image. They are both in colour. The image on the left is taken in what appears to be a bathroom and her body looks swollen around her stomach, although she has a slim figure. She is in her underwear. The image on the right shows her in a gym kit. She is slimmer and appears to be more toned, particularly around her midriff. The caption provides a lot of detail about why she has posted those two images. She describes the left image as a time when she was in the midst of an eating disorder, self-harming and emotionally unstable. The image on the right however is presented as happy and healthy, where she no longer restricts, self-harms and importantly "wants to live". The poster also notes that she has been part of a supportive community and is thanking those who have helped her. She notes she wants to "inspire" others. In terms of intertextuality these two images remind me of the pre and post images you see of people who promote health foods and weight loss plans (i.e. the body coach). In reading this image I am torn in my emotional reaction. She does look healthier in the second image but is also very slim. Some of the words suggest that she has "recovered" but I am drawn to the language she uses when talking about "goals". She states "I achieved many goals and I still have goals to look forward to". This makes me think that she may have developed a dysfunctional way of thinking that is not now focussed on her distress, but her goals. She is not stating that she is relaxed and carefree but rather is stating that she is very

focussed, and that the focus has shifted. So, although I believe the intended message to be one of the poster expressing their recovery, I feel concerned that she is actually expressing her control over her fitness. I also interpret that the poster would want to evoke a reaction of envy when looking at this image, particular if others are struggling with their health, weight or self-harming.

Memorialising

This subtheme related to images that appeared to memorialise the posters self-harm. This links with the 'Language of Addiction' as, although not restricted to addiction, addictive behaviour is often memorialised in the same way, with reminders about what people have overcome and messages that suggest people are stronger afterwards. This sub-theme is different from recovery as the images here did not appear to be celebratory in nature but rather offered a sedate reflection. Some images appeared to be preserving the past whilst others were more celebratory, i.e. to memorialise strength. Images in this sub-theme included posters' comments about how recovery from their maladaptive behaviour (cutting or eating difficulties) had made them stronger and yet the reminders of this (i.e. scars or pictures) provided them with a reminder of what they had been through. This is important as it could provide information about how to work clinically in response prevention.

Just another girl with a few scars.

#submission   #your scars are so beautiful!!   #stunning💖   #self harm scars   #scars   #

4 notes

TU152

Image TU152 is of a female showing the top of her arm. She is wearing a bra but only revealing part of it. There are numerous pale scars on the top of her arm, some of which were clearly from deep cuts as the scars are wide. The scars are centred suggesting they are

the focus of the image. The image alone appears as if the poster is presenting her scars for us to see them, she is letting us know that she has scars there and is not afraid to show them. The image here also presents a glimpse into her room and subtle indicators about her possible interests (e.g. vinyl records). This evokes a sense of voyeurism as it does not appear as is the background of this image has been posed or created in any way. The caption states "just another girl with a few scars". I interpret this as the poster stating that she is not ashamed or embarrassed by her scars that she, along with many others, have lived through a time where things had been difficult for her and she is proud of the reminder of that time that she has overcome. The casual nature of her text suggests that she does not see herself as any different from others but rather the scars are part of her. This is underscored by two of the hashtags she has chosen #your scars are so beautiful!!!, and #stunning. These both suggest that she is proud of her skin. However, she also includes the hashtag #submission which is more difficult to interpret. This may reflect that the poster views that the behaviour as submissive, or simply reflect that the image has been submitted in order to be found by non-harming searches.

I believe that the feeling this poster wanted the viewer to experience was a shared sense of pride, and bearing witness to their experience. I interpret the message of this image is the poster being proud of the reminder that the scars present.

Theme Three: Articulated Distress

This theme is significant as it spoke to both the motivations of those engaging in self-harm and the way in which they chose to talk about this on social media. Distress was highlighted across a range of images presented in other themes but the images within this theme shared an explicit message about feelings of distress, feelings of sadness or a sense of unhappiness in thinking and feeling. This theme includes sub-themes of: Low Self-Worth; Too Many Feelings; and Relationships with Self.

Low Self-Worth

This sub-theme described a number of images that appeared to reflect a poster's ideas about their own worth or self-esteem. This is significant as this range of images provided an insight into the feelings of posters and creators of the images, which, in turn, provided an insight into how to work clinically.

All of the images within this subtheme contained text and used what appeared to be "borrowed" words, or text which appeared to be copied from elsewhere. It is notable that there are no other types of images represented (e.g. selfie or portrait). Across all images the

text was used to present an idea about the self not being good enough, strong enough or special enough.

TU24

Image TU24 was typical of images in this subtheme. It is a full black image with white text stating "I am just another nothing". The image suggests that the poster is using these words to represent how they are feeling. They are letting the viewer know that they identify as being a "nothing". It is also possible that the poster wrote the words themselves although I am inclined to think that they are copied due to the number of images that are similar from different posters. The words suggest the poster has little worth in themselves. By using text and not a photograph it could be interpreted that it was easier for posters within this subtheme to use words to represent their feelings, or that their feelings are too difficult to be captured by a photograph (i.e. how to represent feelings of being worthless). In terms of intertextuality this image appears to be the opposite of colourful positive statement images that are used to inspire (e,g. an image stating "you are worthwhile") which are often viewed as motivation texts. This is the antithesis of a motivational text. My initial emotional reaction is quite dismissive of this image, and other plain text based images. They appear to be less genuine and I wonder whether this is because they did not allow me to see the poster. If this post was a self-portrait and the caption stated "I am just another nothing" would I have held more empathy because I am able to view the person? Also if the poster had articulated why they identified with the said message then maybe it would have evoked a different emotional response. I interpret the intended message of this image to be the poster wanting to let others know that they feel worthless. However, without any personal sentimentality attached to this it is difficult to feel empathy. So where the intended function is to reach out I believe the actual response from others could be to ignore and see it as "attention-seeking".

Too Many Feelings

This sub-theme described images that shared messages of posters feeling overwhelmed by their emotions. This is important as it provided insight into how posters were feeling when they felt compelled to engage in self-harm. This subtheme suggested that posters were at "breaking" point.

one minute i'm doing okay,
and the next i feel like,
the walls are closing in,
i'm being caved in inside my own head,
and my heart starts sounding
like a thousand drums all at once to me,

I burned myself the other night and I'm gonna do it again now.

#relapse #self harm #burning #depression #hurt #sad #anxiety #anger #

472 notes
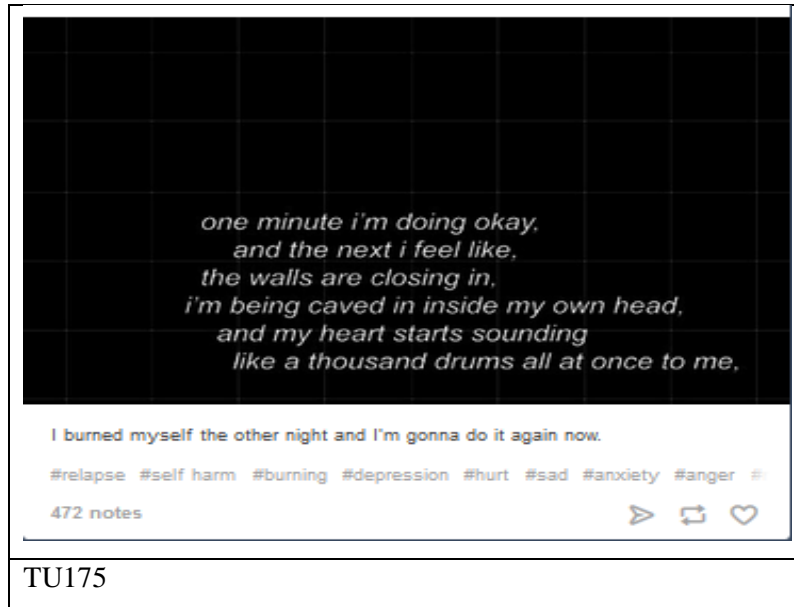
TU175

Image TU175 is typical of images within this subtheme which again used borrowed words or images. There were no self-portraits or intimate shots detailed in this theme. Image TU175 shows a black background with white text. The text describes how emotions can change from feeling OK to falling apart within a minute, alongside physical signs of stress like a pounding heart, and feeling that they are being trapped. Having the white text on a dark background allows you to only focus on the meaning of the words. The meaning of the words suggests the person is feeling completely overwhelmed. It also depicts what could be the symptoms of a panic attack. The caption adds further meaning to this image with the poster letting the reader know that they have burned themselves and are about to do it again. The caption does not reference the image used which makes me interpret the meaning of the image as the poster identifying with those words, letting the viewer make the assumption that this is how they feel. The hashtags underscore their feelings and include #relapse linking in with the earlier theme of 'Language of Addiction.' There are similar intertextual references here where this text reads like the opposite of an inspirational text. In terms of my emotional response I felt more engaged with this text and believe this is because the poster wrote about their experiences. Yet the images themselves are very similar suggesting that the emotional response evoked is somewhat dependent here on the accompanying caption. My emotional response also links with how I made sense of the words and experience of working with people who experience panic and this high level of distress. I

interpret the intended message of this is to let viewers know that they are "drowning", that the poster cannot cope and that people need to know so that they can help.

Relationships with Self

This final sub-theme described messages in images that relate to how the poster is communicating their feelings about themselves in relation to others. This speaks to how interpersonal relationships can affect a person's own feelings about themselves but can also provide the motivation for engaging in self-harm, again something that is helpful to think about clinically. Images in this theme explicitly relate to romantic relationships where posters reference their depression or self-harm as reasons why they are alone. Images also relate to posters' interpersonal relationships with family or peer support networks which affect them. As in the above subthemes all images within this use borrowed words or copied images. There are none of what appear to be poster photographs within this subtheme.

Everyone: Your're too quiet
Me: *Tries to talk
— gets ignored
— gets interrupted
— gets talked over
— no one pays attention
— no one cares

Exactly how I feel

#ignore me   #ignorance   #speak   #alone   #sad   #cry   #talk   #depressed   #d

461 notes

TU181

Image TU181 is a white text image on black background which is similar to others in this theme and typical of what is represented. The text describes how someone is challenging the view that they are too quiet by attempting to talk and have a voice and then when they do they do not get a response. This image relates to articulated distress as the text describes someone who is defeated and feels that they have no power or control. The caption states "exactly how I feel", presented in a common meme format, suggestive of frequent social media use. This lets me know that they have found these words and are using them to represent their own feelings. The intended function of this image is interesting as presumably the poster is followed by people who know them. Therefore is the intended message of this to passively make others aware that the poster feels their voice is ignored? If this is the intended message then it speaks to the potential immaturity of the poster in the way they are wanting others to view their experience. In posting on Tumblr they are

intending others to feel sadness about their experience, but with an additional layer of letting their friends know. I have complex feelings in relationship to this image. My immediate reaction is that the poster is seeking something from posting rather than this is a genuine representation of their feelings. However, I am also interested in their interpersonal way of being with others and it makes me think of clients I have worked with who present with personality difficulties. I also think that this is an interesting use of social media that I observe where people are angry or annoyed about something and instead of saying it directly they find ways to allude to their feelings in a way that is not explicit. The intended function of this is to then have others to ask what is wrong.

Theme Four: Drawn Self-Harm

This theme described a range of drawn images that have been used to represent self-harm. This is a significant theme, partly due to the high number of drawn images noted in the content analysis, but also because it spoke to the different ways in which users choose to represent the idea of self-harm generally. Although some of the images span other themes identified in this thesis, these have been themed together as posters have utilised a different form of artistic expression to represent their messages around self-harm.

Sub-themes within this include: Sexual Drawings and Substitution and Venting.

Sexual Drawings

This sub-theme described a number of drawn images that were sexual in nature. All the drawings within this theme presented some form, occasionally more than one, of self-harm. All the images were sexualised, through naked bodies, or lesbian fetishist scenes. One image appeared to show a cartoon "frisking" another cartoon who looked shocked. The images themselves also presented self-harm that was more severe than would be able to be presented on the body. Examples of this included a drawn naked woman with plasters over her nipples who has slashed her legs to the bone, or a woman who had ripped out her heart. I found the use of more severe self-injury in this subtheme really interesting as it suggested that the creators of these images were wanting to view or draw more significant injuries. It is not known whether the posters in this subtheme engage in self-harm as none of the images articulated this in the captions therefore, they could be creating characters who self-harm. This then positions their drawings as an artistic expression rather than as a personal experience. There are other drawn images in Tumblr where posters explicitly state that they are creating characters who self-harm. By drawing characters that were engaging with self-harm, creators may have been putting on a socially acceptable front to their own behaviour. They could have been testing out what the responses to their characters would be.

Alternatively, it could be so painful for them accepting that they are hurting themselves and are therefore distancing themselves from the behaviour by drawing it in others.

#cuts #patches #bandage #stitches #self harm #soft guro #pills

2 notes

this is much more nsfw than I'm used to drawing, but Im tired and whatever

I usually don't have specific body/gender/sexuality headcanons for characters but I am reaaaaaaally partial to intersex kylo (or trans/genderfluid/agender)

#my art #nsfw #self harm/ #self harm tw #kylo ren #sw #idk if i should

1 note
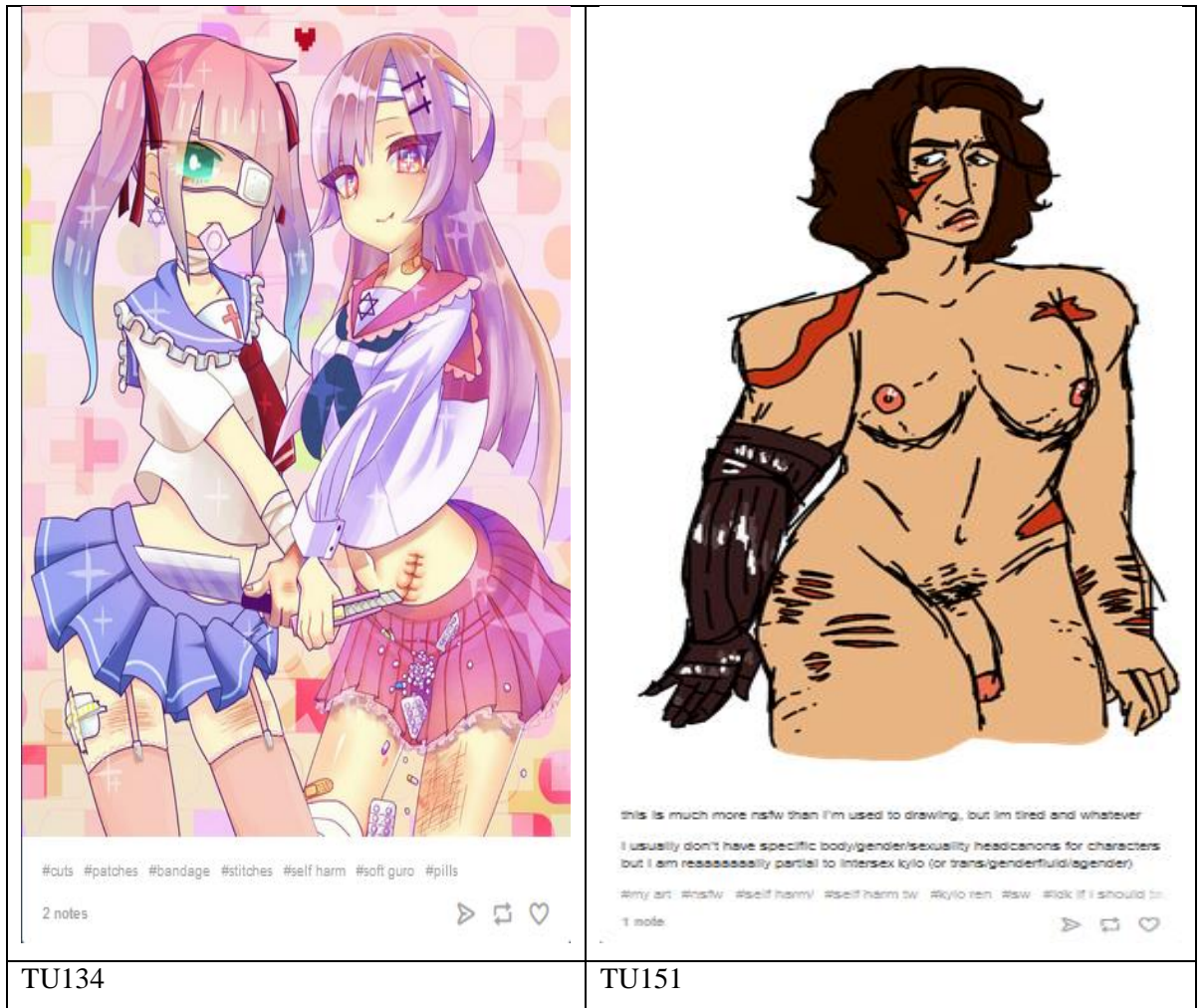
| TU134 | TU151 |

Image TU134 shows a cartoon image of two females. They are drawn in bright shades and they look like they are wearing Japanese school uniforms. Their skirts are very short and one is wearing stockings detailing a sexualised aspect to the image. There are lots of references to self-harm within this image. There are numerous cuts to each female's body, on the legs, arms, stomach and necks. There are also bandages and plasters detailed on the skin suggesting other marks that have been covered up. There are also tablets shown, most notably between the female on the right legs, which is suggestive of representing a vagina. One of the females is holding a carving knife and the other a razor blade. The positioning of the females is reminiscent of lesbian porn style imagery and both of the objects (knife and razor) are pressed against each other and are symbolic of phallus. The hashtags do not add much more information to the image and there is no caption. In terms of intertextuality it is reminiscent of manga type drawings. When looking closer there are also religious symbols drawn on the girls' ties, which are difficult to interpret, perhaps the bringing together of Judaism and Christianity, or perhaps a representation of conflict between the two. This is an image which I interpret is to cause titillation and excitement.

This is a dark image that has been created to be a juxtaposition between sexuality, sexual fetish and self-harm.

Image TU151 shows an image of a drawn naked transgender figure showing to the top of their thighs. The body appears to be male although the breast area could be argued to either be female or incredibly muscly. There are cuts to the thighs and arm. There is also a red line that is drawn from under one eye round the shoulder and to the waist, which looks like a tattoo. The cuts appear to be quite deep and the person's arm is either encased in a long dark glove or could be a prosthetic arm. The accompanying caption adds a deeper meaning as it suggests that this image is a character that the poster has created. They also state that the character has no gender and is NSFW (not safe for work) suggesting that they know the image is explicit. The caption states that the poster does not usually draw something so explicit. They also reference that they are partial to an "intersex kylo". Kylo is a character from the more recent Star Wars who has been seduced to the dark side and aspires to be as powerful as Darth Vader. To my knowledge there is no reference in the films about Kylo harming himself and yet the poster has chosen to "write" that in. The character, however, is a conflicted person who struggles between the light and dark. When the dark is winning he engages in bad acts (e.g. killing his father). Thus the self-harm may be a visual representation of this conflict. It is difficult to interpret what the intended message is here although the poster is clearly showcasing their work. Again the link between presenting self-harm in a sexualised way is interesting as it appears people are linking "dark" characters with this behaviour. This suggests that there could be a narrative where to draw a character as illicit and deviant they could be drawn with self-injuries which pronounces their deviance.

<u>Substitution and Venting</u>

This sub-theme described how posters were using drawn images for the purposes of venting feelings or as substitution for engaging in self-harm. Images in this subtheme included those where posters used the term "vent" in their images suggesting that they were venting particularly distressing feelings and that the way to present those feelings was through their drawings or creations. Vent images that contained self-harm did not necessarily suggest that the person was engaging in self-harm but that they may be using extreme drawings to underscore their distressing feelings.

TU3

Image TU3 above is a drawn image of an androgynous character. Although the short hair could be described as male the clothing and body are more ambiguous. There is blood coming from the mouth and there are cuts to the arm. The blood coming from the mouth is symbolic of vampire imagery, as if the character has just feasted on another. There is text on the image itself stating "reckless piece of shit". Taken alone the image suggests that the creator of this is angry at the character. Reckless could suggest that the character has behaved in a way that they should not have. The caption adds further meaning to the image as it states that it has been a tough week for the poster and the week is not yet over. I interpret that this image has been created for the poster to express their feelings in a creative way. The caption makes me read the image a little differently as it could be interpreted that the poster is writing "reckless piece of shit" about themselves and are using that language as critical thoughts about their own behaviour. It appears as if the poster is harming their character to vent how they are feeling. This is important as it could give some indications about possible help or support for those experiencing distressing feelings. I am drawn to this image and feel sad when I look at it. This is a stronger response than some actual self-injury images I have viewed. I believe this is due to the suggestion that the poster is having a difficult time and their use of language suggests that they are "beaten" by their week. The drawing of this character could be positive as they are able to express their feelings on paper but the use of "reckless piece of shit" is so aggressive and attacking that it makes me feel distressed for the poster. I believe the intended function here is for the poster to let others

know how they are feeling and for others to see that this is how they manage difficult feelings.

Drew a picture to depict what I want to do to myself. Don't want to throw away 1 year of self harm.

#tw self harm   #tw cutting   #tw self hate   #1 year clean

1 note
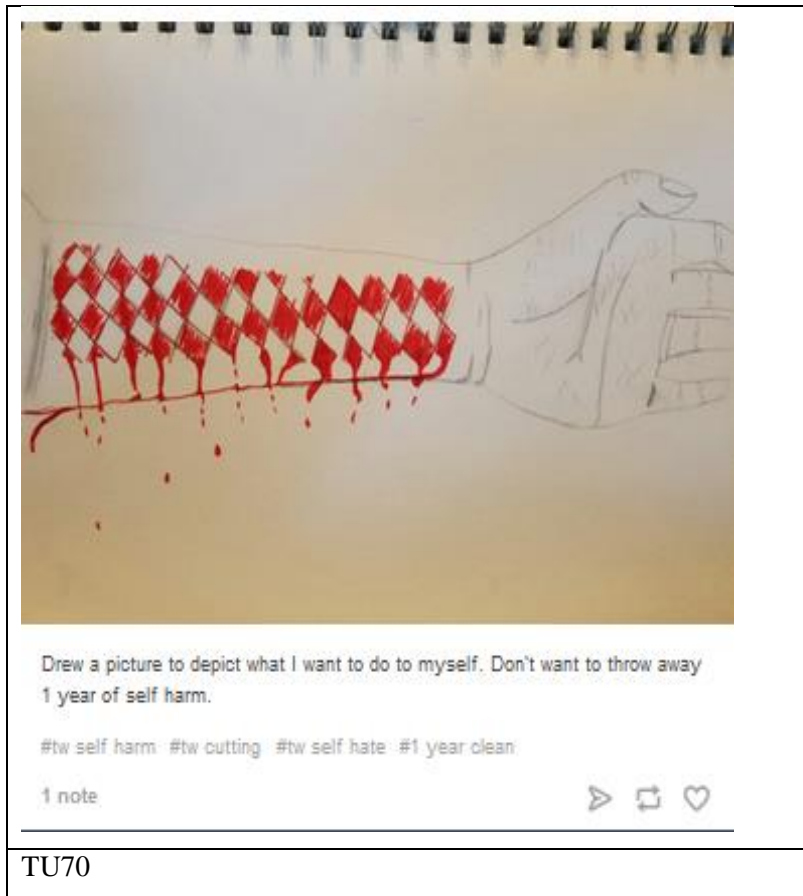
TU70

The idea of substitution is used more explicitly in image TU70. This is a pencil drawn image of a forearm. There are red markings all along the inside of the forearm which are dripping in a diamond shaped pattern. The caption states that they have drawn this image to depict what they do to themselves. They go on to state that they are drawing the image as they don't want to "throw away" one year of self-harm. This suggests that they are using drawing as a substitution for self-harm, thus for this poster drawing blood dripping down a forearm is preventing them from engaging in the act of self-harm. Clinically this is interesting as again it speaks to the ways in which drawing or creating can be used therapeutically for those engaging in self-harm. This image is reminiscent of other self-injury pictures I observed and I wonder whether those are the inspiration for how the poster has created this image. Therefore this could be a symbolic picture to represent their own behaviour. I believe the intended function here is to present the poster as brave, coping and strong. They want others to know that they have managed to stop their self-injurious behaviour but that they are still struggling with this. In letting others know, the intended emotion could be pity or empathy and they are wanting to elicit care and supportive comments. The patterning here is also really interesting as it looks like the creator has "cut out" parts of themselves, as opposed to cut lines.

Twitter Thematic Analysis

Three major themes are presented and one minor theme. Major themes include: Appropriation; Hive Mind; and Recovery. The minor theme presented is Drawing Self-Harm.

Theme One: Appropriation

This theme described the appropriation of the words self-harm to describe either a social phenomenon or used as a way to underline a viewpoint or message. This is significant as it is a phenomenon that is represented in Twitter and not on Instagram or Tumblr. It also links to the results of the content analysis. One of the common purposes for posting on Twitter was to 'inform others'. This is a major theme, both because there were a number of images that presented this phenomenon, but also because it offers an interesting perspective on what Twitter, as a platform, was used for in relation to discussions about self-harm. In addition, this theme included discussions that did not necessarily always fit with a clinical understanding of what self-harm is.

This theme presented images where self-harm was used in a way that moves the meaning from a personal behaviour and a coping strategy, to a way to describe how groups of people, or businesses act in a way to harm the country or a group. This also includes examples of where self-harm had been used as a term to underscore a joke or message of dislike about something. Sub-themes within this are Brexit, and Black Humour.

Brexit

During the period of data collection the UK was in the midst of a referendum to leave the European Union. This sub-theme related to images commenting on the referendum decision and describing this as an act of national "self-harm". These images show the word "self-harm" being used as an analogy to describe what these posters viewed as a mistake and a decision that will cause harm to the country, thus changing the meaning of the world "self" to "community" taking a personal behaviour and transposing it onto a social behaviour.

T21

Image T21 is typical of images within this theme. It is a shared news article about Brexit and the impact it will have on the country. Images within this sub-theme were often shared news articles or political commentary on the decision with captions referencing how the poster negatively views the decision. Images in this sub-theme also suggest that the "self-harm" inflicted by the vote was part of the appeal which suggests that the vote was seen as a signifier that the country has lost a collective hope for the future. This also links with the content analysis as one of the most common stated purposes noted in Twitter was to "Inform Others", which provides information on how people utilise Twitter, to share information with others in the form of news articles.

The poster of image T21 asks the question in their caption "Why did we self-harm?" They also hash tagged #Brexit, presumably in this instance as a way to join in the discourse around the vote on Twitter and to let others know that this is what they were referencing. The caption also links to the article which is asking questions about whether people were voting to "make things worse". The questioning caption suggests that the poster disagrees with the vote and is therefore either upset or disappointed. They are also intending to either receive responses to this post or are making their view clear about this. In terms of the emotion it evokes, it is interesting to think about how this would depend on what viewers' political alliances are. If you are reading the post and voted leave in the referendum then you may feel angry. If, however, you were feeling upset and distressed about it then you might have a sense of identification with the poster. As a message it suggests the poster is unhappy with the decision and is using the term self-harm to describe a phenomenon of broad societal harm rather than as an individual behaviour. In terms of a reaction to the self-

harm content, as this image does not link in any way to self-harm as a behaviour that I am interested in it feels like it is an unhelpful use of this phrase.

Black Humour

     This sub-theme described a range of images that are presented as jokes that relate to being driven to self-harm and to underline a negative feeling about an object or experience. In this sub-theme posters used the term self-harm to describe their feelings of annoyance and to describe how they engaged in acts that might be viewed by others as embarrassing or "cheesy". An example of this was an image of a salad and a reference in the post suggesting that eating a salad was self-harming. This is interpreted as a comedic way of suggesting that eating a salad, as opposed to unhealthy food, is actually causing harm because it is not as nice. It is not known whether the posters of images within this sub-theme actually do engage in self-harm but from the images and the text it suggests that the term self-harm is being used for comedic effect.

T132

     Image T132 articulates this theme. The poster has shared a screenshot image of a song by Britney Spears, from what appears to be a music streaming service. On its own the image is ambiguous. The caption however, states "YES I SELF-HARM". When viewed together this suggests that they are asserting that by listening to Britney Spears they are harming themselves. An interpretation of this would be that the poster is using the term "self-harm" in a comedic way to refer to something that others may view as unpleasant.

     The caption in capital letters suggest that the poster is almost defiant in their preferences for the music and they are using the post to let others know what they like and

enjoy. This post evokes some mirth at the misuse of the word, and I would interpret that this is the intended emotion of the poster. However, images within this subtheme generally provoke annoyance and irritation. This response is filtered through the lens of me as a clinician, and I feel the use of self-harm to denote things that may seem "annoying" to others as belittling of the experience of those engaging in self-harm.

The message of this image is again that the term self-harm has been appropriated and used in a comedic way to infer a different understanding of what constitutes self-harm. However, this is with little thought or seemingly interest in the actual reference the posters are misusing.

Theme Two: Hive Mind

This theme was a major theme within the Twitter dataset. I used the term 'Hive Mind' to describe this theme. A 'Hive Mind' is described as "an entity consisting of a large number of people who share their knowledge of opinions with one another, regarded as producing either uncritical conformity of collective intelligence" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017).

This theme described how posters used the Twitter medium to interact with others and to gain support, agreement or just responses. This is a significant theme as it represented a phenomenon that is very obvious on Twitter that is not as easily identified on Tumblr or Instagram. It also links with the stated purpose of 'reach out' as noted in the content analysis. That is not to say that there is no interaction on the other two platforms but Twitter in particular presented a strong interactional element where posters were using the platform functionally to influence others, to share a strong emotion with others, and to seek others' approval or support.

Sub-themes within this are: Follow me and Outrage.

Follow Me

This sub-theme described posts that were clearly displaying a request for action from others. The posts were asking others to do something, to follow them in their requests. This is interesting as it represented posters utilising Twitter to both ask people about their views on self-harm and to activate others to do something in response to their concerns around self-harm in others. An example of this was a poster sharing a vote, embedded in a tweet, to ask whether it was OK to joke about self-harm if they or someone they know engage in it. Here they were requesting others share their opinions to help them inform their own. They were also possibly letting others know that they are engaging in this behaviour, but using a vote as a way to distance themselves from potential negative responses. Although the intent

of posts could not be fully determined it was clear that posters were utilising Twitter in order to engage in interaction with others around self-harm issues.

T80

Image T80 is typical of images within this sub-theme. It is a shared tweet with a photograph of a person smiling to the camera. The text in the shared tweet is "have you seen this man? Help us out". The poster in the original tweet has also hash tagged three letters, suggestive of a location. The poster of image T80 has shared this message. Taken on its own it suggests that the poster of T80 is sharing to broaden the audience. The shared image does not say why the person needs to be found. However, the caption of image T80 contains more information with the poster suggesting that the man in the photograph has "threatened self-harm". They also repeat the location tag and add another location tag. The use of "Please help!" suggests that they are hoping those who view this post will act in some way.

This is an interesting use of this medium, essentially a social media campaign asking people to look for someone who is potentially in danger in the area, therefore asking others to follow them and act in a way the poster wants them to. This presents an interesting dual-nature of social media, in terms of the poster asking others to follow what they are doing, but in doing this they are promoting their own compassion. By articulating to others that they are concerned about someone else they are positioning themselves as kind and caring. I feel interested when I look at this image. My reaction when viewing a post like this outside of the research context would be to follow the original poster and to find out more information about the location they are describing. I interpret the intended function of the image as a request that others who view it do something in terms of action, either retweeting the post or responding. I interpret a secondary function to be presenting the poster as a compassionate person. There is also a further interpretation that the poster could be sharing the image to show the person in it that they care, if they are known to them. In terms of intertextuality the purpose of this message links to news agencies sharing of "missing people" or people at risk of harm.

The images in this sub-theme speak to how powerful a medium all social media platforms are - but especially Twitter - as they give people the opportunity to not only state their beliefs and views but ask others to follow them in doing so, possibly without sharing evidence. It could be argued that there was an element of control of information here where posters were expressing views that some content is not acceptable and seeking to control this, or, where posters were seeking to motivate others to be involved in an act without necessarily providing all the information. Linking to the 'Hive Mind' they are asking people to uncritically conform to their view and support them in theirs.

Outrage

This sub-theme related to where images had been used to express outrage, anger or annoyance. These images relate to an overall theme of the 'Hive Mind' as posters were choosing to share their outrage on social media in order to change others' perceptions, or to get them to conform to their world view. Images in this sub-theme included angry posts about jokes being shared about self-harm. These images tended to be shared tweets from others with captions from the poster stating that they were angry about the content. These images served as a function to let those who view the tweets know that the poster has a point of view about the issue raised. Other images within this sub-theme included those where posters had shared information from a company or promotional account that they disagreed with as it appeared to them to glorify self-harm. In these examples posters tagged the company detailed. This suggests that not only were posters sharing their outrage, but they were linking in the companies to let them and others know that they were outraged. This also suggests that they believed that engaging with companies on social media in this way might have some sway over what a company chooses to post.

There is an argument that these posts were an attempt to restrict the views and opinions of others. By expressing outrage, posters were either provoking others to respond or they were restricting the chance that others could express an alternative opinion.

to everyone who thinks self harm is pretty or cute or is going to make you the heroin of some teen fiction book

T22

Image T22 represents this theme. The poster shares what is possibly their own arm in response to those who romanticise self-harm. The image itself could be a display of self-harm alone. It is a black and white image of a forearm that has been cut several times. The cuts are quite severe and harsh, although the harshness is lessened by the grayscale used. It is still a raw and striking image but perhaps the viewer is protected slightly from the severity of the cuts as the blood is not visible. When looking at the accompanying text, the poster is challenging those who think self-harm is cute. By sharing their picture of self-injury, they are showing the brutal reality of what more serious cuts look like. The fervent nature of the post would suggest that this image was posted in response to things the poster has seen that sensationalise self-harm. The poster references that self-harm will not make people the heroine of teen fiction which I interpret as a way of suggesting that some people are drawn to self-harm for reasons other than coping with distress, or that the poster believes this to be the case. The link to teen fiction suggests the poster is outraged by disingenuous "self-harmers" who may engage in this behaviour for the attention from others. I am drawn to this poster and from a clinical point of view feel conflicted about these messages being around in social media. I feel a sense of sadness, both at the harshness of the image and about the caption of the poster. There are negative views about people who only engage in superficial self-injury, some of which I have been surprised to notice in my own responses, and yet I know that this provides a function for that person, which may be "attention-needing" over "attention-seeking". The message here of this image is clear: do not sensationalise self-harm and do not engage in this behaviour for reasons that the poster does not feel to be appropriate. This could be interpreted as a sense of superiority, or "my self-harm is more meaningful than those I see here". The poster is also engaging in performance here, in letting others know what their reality is and what their position is on this behaviour.

Theme Three: Recovery

Recovery was a strong theme within the Twitter site and is presented as a major theme. This was a significant theme as it presented how posters, who were engaging in self-harm, were using Twitter as a platform to celebrate their recovery and to share their experiences of disengaging from self-harm behaviour.

There were a number of images that were celebratory in nature. These celebratory images spoke of a life post self-harm that was happier and more relaxed. This was significant as it suggested that posters were utilising Twitter in a positive way. It may perform a way to memorialise their achievements. Posters were also wanting others to view their achievements and their recovery, which became part of their social identity.

There were a range of images found within this theme. Celebratory images included collages of selfie photographs of what one assumes to be the poster and their friends. In these collage images all people within them were smiling or happy and appeared to be sharing fun and enjoyable times together. Celebratory style images also included those where a famous person was pictured dancing. Two examples in this theme were Carlton from The Fresh Prince and Snoop Dogg. Both of the images suggested the characters were dancing and the captions suggesting that the poster is "free" from self-harm. This links in with the content analysis where it is noted there was a significant number of images where the emotional tone was categorised as happy (11.5%) compared to the other two platforms.

I have presented three images within this theme that capture the message of recovery.

T87

Image T87 is typical of a number of images in this theme. It shows a larger picture of a person laughing on a bridge, then three smaller images of the same person with a collection of friends, all smiling or laughing. The image alone suggests that the poster is happy and they want to celebrate this. The caption alongside this image states "One year self-harm free" and an emoji of a heart. This adds a deeper meaning to the image. It could be interpreted that this is the kind of life they are able to enjoy now they are not engaging in self-harm. In using these images to depict recovery the poster is stating that now they are able to have fun, see friends and enjoy life, which they could not do before. The poster is presenting to others what looks like an ideal experience. The poster looks glamorous in the larger shot and is reminiscent of "care-free" adverts promoting an ideal image of a young person's life.

The images are in colour and it is shown to be daylight with the sun shining in the larger image. I felt cheerful when looking at this image, it looks like the person is enjoying themselves and they present an attractive collage of happy images. However, I also had a cynical response to this image which appeared to whitewash real experience and present an idealised view of a person's life. The main image appears staged to look as if it is a casual captured shot yet it does not feel that this is the case. The image is also reminiscent of fashion images or perfume adverts, where people are presented living an idealised life without a care in the world. Taken with the caption, I interpret that the intended function of the message is for others to notice that the poster is now living an ideal life now they have broken the "bonds" of their behaviour. The message of this image is "look at my life now". They are asking others to both bear witness to their recovery and to admire them for it again linking to presenting a certain lifestyle they want people to believe they embody, and perhaps feel envious of.

T36

Image T36 also presents what was typically identified in this theme. The image on its own is a colour four photograph collage of an arm. In the top two images the arm is shown to be placed on sheets, possibly bed sheets and there are numerous red, newly healed, scars to the arm shown on the front and back. The bottom two images however show that the scars have healed, they have turned into smaller paler white scars. This image on its own appears to represent a clear message of recovery. The caption confirms this stating "I'm now 400 days clean and I'm so proud of myself, bio oil is really good at healing scars!" The image is a colour close up, with a non-identifiable background so the arm is the focus of the image. This image represents the embodiment of healing. The poster is letting the viewer see their recovery; here the skin represents their difficulties improving over time. By showing the healing scars this is an embodied representation of how they have managed to

not engage in self-injury behaviour, which is also a way of letting the viewer know that they are not now experiencing the difficulties they once were, which led them to engage in self-injury. The poster states that they are proud. They are proudly showing their skin and the healing quality. The use of bio oil suggests that they do not want a reminder of their scars as a way to underline what challenges they have been through. I interpret the intended message of this image is to share their recovery, which is apparent without the text. I did not have a strong emotional reaction when looking at the image. I find these images really interesting in the way that they represent both a recovery from self-injury scars and also in how they offer a statement to the world that encompasses more than this, a statement that they are no longer the same person with the same experiences: when the scars are all gone then no-one will know.

As I said, it's bleeding a lot but here is my water colour-y flowers tattoo, which is covering old self harm scars

T70

The final image I chose to articulate this theme is image T70. There were a number of images that represented tattoos that are linked to the theme of recovery. A number of these tattoo images were shared articles informing others about initiatives where tattoo artists were giving free tattoos in order to cover self-harm scars. Images also included those where posters were presenting before and after images of where tattoos had covered self-harm scars. Tattoos were also utilised to represent personal growth with written tattoo statements such as "warrior" and semi-colon tattoos which represent suicide prevention.

Image T70 is a before-and-after image of a tattoo covering some faded self-injury scars. On its own, the intended function of the image is clear, that the poster wants to share images of their tattoo that has covered their scars. Interestingly this could be interpreted differently to image T36 although both are sharing recovery pictures. Where image T36 is presenting the skin recovering and becoming clear, the poster of image T70 is looking to cover all traces of their previous self-injurious behaviour with colour rather than removal. The caption relates to a description of the tattoo and states that it is covering scars. This image represents a "covering up" of self-harm or "making clean". It could be interpreted

that the poster does not want a reminder of their previous engagement with this behaviour. Alternatively it could be interpreted that the poster could want the tattoo as a reminder of what they have overcome. I would interpret the message as the former, because the caption lets us know that the tattoo is covering scars. It is reminiscent of many images of adverts for skin products showcasing a "before and after". As an emotional reaction I feel distant from this image. It is presented as if the poster is pleased that they have covered their scars and in that sense they have also distanced themselves from this behaviour. This perhaps reinforces the message that time has gone by and they are no longer that person, and therefore have little emotional connection to that person or their behaviour.

Theme Four: Drawing Self-Harm

This theme described how posters were using drawings to represent self-harm, which encompassed 14% of the Twitter sample. Due to the small number of images this was a minor theme; however, there were some interesting drawn images that were similar to those seen in Tumblr, and to a lesser extent, in Instagram.

This was an interesting theme, both because it had shared commonality with other platforms, but also as it presented the ways in which posters used their creative expression to represent self-harm; both self-harm they could potentially have engaged in and self-harm that they had created for their characters.

Examples in this theme were all drawn images that detailed self-injury or references to injury. Images in this category could have been placed in different themes although as they were representative of a different type of creative expression I have placed them together. The two sub-themes within this are: Creating Artefacts and Substitution and Venting.

Creating Artefacts

This sub-theme related to what appeared to be created artefacts. It contained images that clearly related to self-harm but did not state any reference to the poster engaging in self-harm or any personal link with self-harm. The images that were included in this theme were both drawings that appeared to be representative of self-injury (e.g. drawn cuts), and those that were more ambiguous (e.g. animals, or more symbolic images where self-harm is presented). 'Creating Artefacts' is an important sub-theme as it suggested that posters were looking to develop "art" that represented self-harm, without necessarily pointing to them engaging with this. This suggested that engagement with self-harm artistry could be appealing to some, it could also speak to the perceived "dark" or enticing nature of self-harm. Artists could be drawn to creating characters with complex emotions and behaviours,

and self-harm representation could be a straight-forward complex behaviour to represent visually. Equally, the posters drawing self-harm imagery could be engaging in this behaviour and using the drawings as a way to show this to others, whilst maintaining their anonymity.

I have chosen two images to represent this sub-theme which offer different perspectives on creating artefacts.

Small but meaningful #self-harm #drawing #sketch

11:31 PM - 12 Sep 2016

T134

Image T134 is a drawn image of what looks like a female body. The drawing finishes just below the breast area. The arms and torso are shown to have numerous cuts. There is also a blue and red dark patch shown on the hip which could represent a more significant cut or a tattoo. The placing of the cuts could indicate that the person who made the image has a more intimate knowledge of self-harm behaviour although, one could read any account of self-harm and realise that the placing of these cuts was typical. The caption suggests that the poster has either created a drawing about self-harm that they want to share with others, which is underscored by the use of the hashtag for #self-harm and #drawing, or they have found a drawing that they identify with. It is unclear. The creator of the drawing has also signed it between the legs. The use of the word "meaningful" could be interpreted that the poster feels that self-harm is a meaningful area to draw, or it could be that they have a personal relationship or engage in the act of self-harm.

I was drawn to this image and the reason that the poster has shared it. I feel that the image portrays a sense of vulnerability in the way that the character is drawn in their underwear and has their arm placed behind their back. It could suggest that these cuts are

generally hidden and yet in this image they are showing them, or being made to show them. It is difficult to interpret the function, but it is clear that someone has created this image and the message is the poster letting us know that this image is meaningful to them, whether or not they created it.
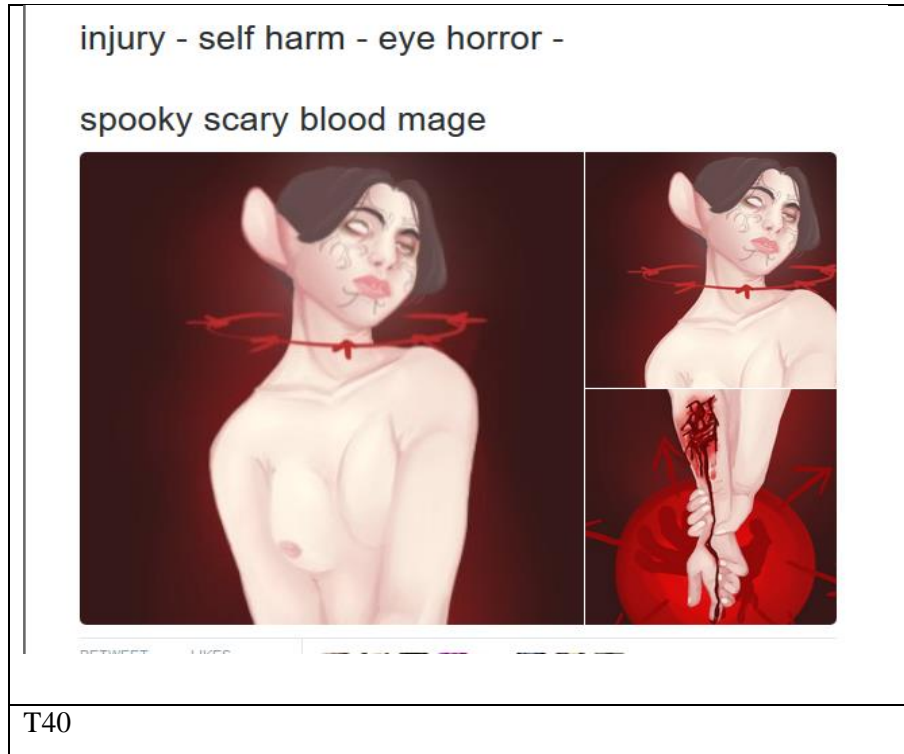
T40

Image T40 presents a more ambiguous created artefact that is typical of images within this sub-theme. This image has a sense of unreality to it. It is a montage of three images showing a naked woman from the waist up. The larger image shows her with her eyes closed and a drawn red ring around her neck. The other two smaller images show a close up of her face and a close up of her arms which are held together and are bleeding from a large wound. There is the shadow of another hand reaching out to take the female's hands. It looks from the woman's face that she is barely conscious and possibly drugged, or alternatively is in too much pain. One eye is rolled up and the other is half open. The caption states "injury – self-harm – eye horror - spooky scary blood mage". This caption adds a deeper meaning to the image suggesting that the eye is actually damaged. A mage is a magician or learned person, so the caption could link to fantasy gaming of some kind. It is clear the poster is presenting this as a gory and dark image. I am a little disturbed by the image, in particular when looking closely at the eyes. Linking to the caption "eye horror" suggests the eye is damaged and on closer inspection it appears as if the character may have died. The red hand grabs my attention and as it is coming from below it appears reminiscent of a demonic image, or has some religious symbolism. This also links with the red wire around the neck which is similar to the crown of thorns. The gash on the arm appears to be dropping blood into the abyss, ready for whatever is waiting. This image also reminds me of some manga imagery. I believe the message of this image is to share a "dark"

characterisation with others which implies that the intended function may be to shock or appal others. In addition to this it may link to a community online that is representing fantasy gaming and is therefore speaking to a specific community.

The images that sit within this sub-theme presented how posters could be interested and fascinated in self-harm, and the aesthetic of it, potentially without engaging in it themselves, although they occasionally imply personal experience. The images could be artefacts that the posters are creating where the protagonist self-harms, suggesting self-harm itself could be perceived as dark, exciting and interesting.

Substitution and Venting

This sub-theme described a range of drawn images that appeared to have been created to offer a substitution for the poster engaging in self-harm. Although the images that sit within this sub-theme could be termed artefacts, the posters explicitly stated their intention to vent, or to substitute their behaviour with a drawing or creation. This sub-theme was important as it presented ways in which posters were articulating coping strategies to manage their self-harm behaviour. This led to ideas of how strategies or coping skills could be used clinically, and suggested that drawing could be helpful for those who are engaging in self-harm by offering an alternative.

This sub-theme encompassed images that were cartoons showing a person being pecked by a bird, and drawn lines which could be interpreted as self-injury but are not shown on a body. All images contained within this sub-theme referenced venting or substitution. Arguably, substitution has a clear interpretation; that the poster is using drawing to substitute their engagement in self-harm. Vent, however, could be interpreted in a way that the poster is venting in order to share their feelings that might be contributing to self-harm and are, therefore, drawing self-harm in their images, or alternatively, they could be venting just general feelings and it happens that the image contains self-harm.

I'm sorry! It's a self harm drawing but yeah....
I'm sorry.... I would rather draw it then do it to
myself....
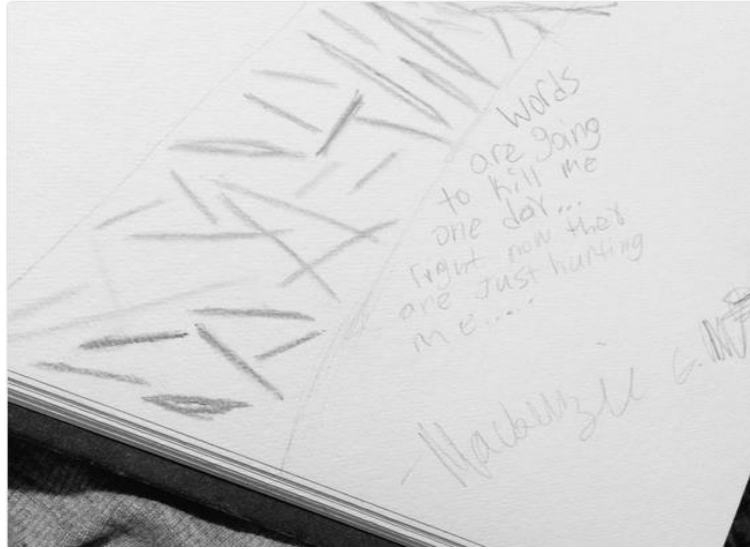
T63

Image T63 makes this interpretation very explicit. It shows a pencil-drawn arm with a number of cuts on it. There is also writing in pencil stating "words are going to kill me one day…right now they're just hurting me". The text within the image suggests that the motivation behind the self-injury displayed is others' words. In addition it suggests that the poster engages in self-injury because they are hurt by others but that their self-injury will one day turn into suicide. The poster apologises for their self-harm drawing, perhaps expecting negative responses to the image. However, they then say that they would prefer to draw this image than to do it to themselves. This reinforces the idea that art can be a strategy and act as a catharsis for those engaging in self-injury and that in this case the poster has drawn an image of self-injury as a substitution for their self-harm behaviour. Although the drawing itself does not evoke a strong emotion or feeling, I felt hopeful for the poster in their text. As a clinician it is encouraging to read about a coping behaviour. However, alongside this there is clearly a function to sharing the image that relates to the reaction of others. The poster has not just drawn an image to prevent themselves from engaging in self-harm, they have also shared this image on social media therefore letting others know that they both engage in self-harm and are trying to stop themselves. This again links to the ways in which posters are choosing to represent their self-harm (or lack of) behaviour and the way in which they want others to view this.

Cross Site Analysis

This section presents some findings from the cross site analysis. This analysis was undertaken to explore interesting themes that could be identified once all sites were explored together. This section does not include a detailed analytic write up of the images presented, rather will reference commonalities of sites, where they diverge and where sites present unique themes.

Table 11 presents the individual site themes and the links between them in terms of meaning and content.

Table 11. Cross site analysis themes

Instagram Themes	Tumblr Themes	Twitter Themes
Addiction	Addiction	Recovery
Motivation	Articulated Distress	x
Identity	x	x
Gender	Gender	x
Body Image	Gender (Sub-theme: Sexualised Idealised Form)	x
X	Drawn self-harm	Drawing self-harm
X	x	Appropriation
X	x	Hive Mind

The broad representation of self-harm

An interesting finding of this study was the unexpectedly small number of images where self-harm was present. As detailed in the content analysis just over half of all images across the three sites contained self-harm, although this number was slightly skewed by Twitter, where only 39% of images presented self-harm. I expected a higher number of images representing self-harm directly. Therefore, although posters were using the hashtag self-harm or self-harm in the text or their caption, there was a much broader range of images that posters used to represent self-harm.

In terms of self-injury, although images that represented this type of self-harm were not detailed as major themes in the analysis it is important to note that across all three sites self-injury was represented and it was an essential part of many themes. As detailed in the content analysis images typically presented arms that were cut. Below is a small selection of typical images of self-injury.

| I95 | I100 | TU55 |

When looking at the data as a whole, however, there were qualitative differences between the types of cutting depicted in the images. There were a number of images in each site where cuts were done in a more controlled and organised fashion. The images here demonstrate photographs that present patterning cuts on the skin, which included images that presented drawn self-injury.

| I54 | I104 | T98 |

| TU40 | TU66 | TU70 |

These images taken together present cutting that is more akin to writing or carving on the skin. The cutting is done in organised lines and the cuts are clearly controlled. These appear to me to be more similar to scarification practices. These controlled patterns were

different to other cutting presented across the sites and as a behaviour may perform different functions and, in turn, respond to different interventions.

The female experience

This shared phenomenon describes how there were images across all sites that represented the female form. The majority of images where a person was represented was of a female. This was true across all sites, although as detailed in the content analysis, it was more apparent on Instagram and Tumblr. This was an interesting finding when looking across sites as it raises questions about why the female gender is represented so much more than the male in images that are identified as representing self-harm. Potentially females are more willing to be identified as connected with self-harm, or perhaps more women could be willing to be identified in general on social media.

Qualitatively there were also more females represented in the selfies, or when faces were shown, across the three sites. This could be because the majority of posters were female, or it could mean that the posters that were most willing to be identified are female. In addition to this, when a full body was shown in images it was commonly of a female. Again this could point to the prevalence of female posters, or could point to female posters being more accepting of sharing their body on social media. Perhaps the sharing of the female form was more socially acceptable than the male, and more ubiquitous in media in general. This could also reinforce the false narratives about young women and self-harm as discussed in Chapter One.

Sexualised images

Linked to the high representation of females in the data another commonality across the three sites were sexualised images. These were presented both in photographic images and in drawn images. As detailed in the thematic analysis for Tumblr there were subthemes of 'Sexualised Idealised Form', 'Subverted Glamour' and 'Sexual Drawings'. Similarly, in Instagram the theme of 'Gender' encompassed a number of sexualised images both subverted and what could be described as typically sexualised. This suggests that both Instagram and Tumblr are sites where sexualised female forms were represented.

However, that is not to say that this was not represented on Twitter. Although there was not a theme of sexualised images, there were two interesting images on Twitter, detailed below, which were of the same person and seemed to be advertising sexual services for "cock and ball torture". This speaks to an interesting difference on Twitter as a platform, which presented these images not just as mere representations of sexuality, but rather as an advertisement. This places Twitter as different to Instagram and Tumblr for what is represented.

| T91 | T96 |

The representation of thinness

Another interesting phenomenon that was observed on both Instagram and Tumblr that links to the female experience were representations of thin white females. A sample of these images is detailed below, although there were numerous examples. Interestingly, not only were the images representing eating difficulties but they were generally representing thinness. As detailed in the thematic analysis 'Body Image' was a theme in Instagram, but the thin body was also represented in Tumblr within the 'Gender' subtheme.

| TU195 | TU190 | I25 |

These three images suggest that people are posting photos that either represent their own thinness, their desire to lose weight or that they are hoping to achieve this type of idealised body.

What was interesting was how this represented what was perhaps socially acceptable generally in society, and not just on social media. Having a high representation of idealised or thin white bodies suggested that people felt comfortable or proud of showing those bodies. One would assume that users of these social media sites do not always have what would be described as "typically attractive" bodies and yet they are not represented. This phenomenon suggests that Instagram and Tumblr are both spaces where the preference for thinness is represented. I was frustrated generally by this overrepresentation of the ideal image. I interpret that was both as a personal frustration with societal messages about weight but also was through the lens of working with adolescent females who are negatively affected by images they view online.

The importance of sharing recovery

Identified across all individual sites was the theme of recovery. This theme described a large number of images across the data set where posters presented images and text that related to their recovery from self-harm. This suggested that people have gone to each of these sites to share their thoughts on their recovery and that they chose these sites to memorialise their recovery process. There were interesting differences across the sites in terms of their representation of recovery images. On Instagram and Tumblr there was a more complex representation of recovery messages that were themed under a broader representation of self-harm as addictive generally. On Instagram and Tumblr recovery tied into messages of compulsion and relapse. On Twitter however, all the recovery messages were celebratory in nature suggesting platform differences in how people talk about their engagement in self-harm.

Use of "inspirational messages"

There was a high representation of the use of inspirational style messages and quotes. These images are similar to the images that are seen across multiple media for varying messages, e.g. 'Keep Calm and Carry On'. The images below present a small sample of the type of images observed that could be described as "inspirational" texts.

I154	I178

TU159	T60

By utilising these copied texts it suggests that posters were searching for words to provide some kind of function. These words could be used to inspire others, to inspire themselves or alternatively used to try and convince themselves that they are worthwhile

and one day they will feel better. I find the use of these type of messages interesting as they feel quite emotionless, trite and not always genuine. I also wonder whether the use of the more generic and over the top messages, like I154 and I178, belittle people's experience and distress. A message saying "you matter" could be interpreted negatively by people who are feeling worthless and who are engaging in self-harm. However, there are inspirational style messages that do feel more genuine, e.g. TU159, that appear to relate to a person's experience rather than relying on a pat phrase.

<u>Twitter on its own</u>

A striking difference across the sites was the aesthetics and content of Twitter compared to Instagram and Tumblr. As detailed in the thematic analysis, although there are common themes around recovery and drawings the Twitter sample clearly diverged from Instagram and Tumblr in terms of its representation of self-harm. There was a range of images that appeared on Twitter that were not presented on Tumblr or Instagram. As noted with the 'Appropriation' theme on Twitter, the use of self-harm terminology here shifts from a personal experience to be utilised as a way to describe societal harm. In addition to this, there were several examples where self-harm was used as a term of mockery or as the means of a joke. There were also images that presented Twitter as more of an interactive social media site and to share information rather than just presenting information to others. This was captured in the theme of 'Hive Mind'.

In this sense Twitter was qualitatively different from Instagram and Tumblr. It was predominantly a site which displays content of the "here and now", an information sharing site, predominantly focussed on text, and had a clearer interactive element. Thus it is suggested that in terms of meaningful self-harm content, Twitter was the weakest of the three platforms.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

This study has offered a unique contribution to the literature through exploring self-harm imagery across three social media sites.

In this final chapter, the discussion begins by again presenting the research questions and providing a commentary on the extent to which the findings have answered the research questions posed. This is followed by a summary of the findings and then an in depth discussion of the key issues. The strengths and limitations of the study are presented followed by the clinical implications of this research including comment on the impact of social media on the future of clinical psychology. Finally suggestions for avenues of future research have been presented.

Research Questions

I sampled from selected sites to explore the following research questions:

Content

1. What images and text are people posting about self-harm?
2. What form do the images and text take?

Meaning

3. What do the images and text tell us about the motives for self-harm?
4. What do the images and text tell us about the motives for posting on social media?

The understanding of these questions was influenced by the constraints on form and content that are apparent in the platforms themselves. The final research question was:

5. How do the image-sharing sites aid our understanding of how particular cultures or communities manage discourse about self-injury?

The visual content analysis was an ideal analytical approach that allowed me to identify the content of images that represented self-harm and to successfully answer the first two research questions. The development of a coding framework, which was deductively built upon previous research, provided a way to catalogue images and their content not only in relation to their presentation of self-harm but of a variety of interesting visual content. The next section provides a summary of the content of the images and the creative ways in which posters were using imagery to represent self-harm.

As I was interested in more than just the explicit content of the images, the thematic analysis provided a framework with which I was able to engage in a more interpretative analysis of the images and text and to develop themes across the data. This approach worked alongside and added value to the content analysis as it allowed for reading the images with a more interpretative eye. This analytical approach provided some answers to the third and fourth research questions. There were clear themes that related to a poster's motivation for engaging in self-harm. These included messages about self-harm being addictive, about the involvement of distress and using self-harm as a coping mechanism to manage feelings of being overwhelmed, of having low self-worth and of having distressing and upsetting relationships with others and with themselves. Although, I would not argue that this analysis was able to provide the totality of motivations of those engaging in self-harm due to the ambiguous nature of images.

The fourth question relating to the motivations for posting onto social media was more difficult to answer. There were some clear representations proffered such as posting images to vent, to express feelings and to offer a substitution for their self-harm behaviour. There were also clear representations where a post appeared to be intended to mark the poster as part of a community or sub-culture. However, without the ability to ascertain directly from the posters their motivations in posters these findings should be read as tentative and requiring of further research.

An exploration of the sites, including a scoping exercise, and an analysis of themes across sites allowed me to develop an understanding of individual site differences, most notably as seen on Twitter. This provides some tentative ideas about how the sites themselves can add to our understanding of the communities using them, and in turn in how those communities engage in conversations or interactions about self-harm. This provided the basis for answering the fifth research question. However, as discussed this was a brief analysis of the sites rather than a detailed examination of all of their properties, so again the findings should be seen as tentative. Nevertheless, the findings did support me to consider some broader literature that may explain some of these differences such as the work of Judith Butler (1988).

Summary of findings

The results of this study suggest that social media is being used widely to discuss and represent self-harm. Although this study only analysed a snapshot of images the scoping exercise evidenced thousands of posts that were shared referencing self-harm.

What was striking from this study was the myriad of ways in which self-harm was being represented visually in ways different than I expected. Images were a mix of photography of

direct self-harm, text images, photographs of people, photographs of objects, selfies, collages, stock photos and creations (e.g. drawings, cartoons). These images were not just depicting the act of self-harm in whatever form it took but were depicting, amongst others things, motivations, distress, humour, ways of coping and the sharing of information.

Arguably, this range of imagery and analysis has provided a novel contribution to the literature around self-harm. These findings justify the decision to embrace a broad inclusion criterion allowing for any image the poster had chosen to represent self-harm, even if it did not fit within a clinical definition. This allowed me to explore the symbolism in the imagery, and the associated motivations and emotions of the posters. The results suggested self-harm needs to be understood as more than the act itself.

The images that did portray self-harm predominantly displayed self-injury, most notably cutting. However, as discussed, there was a myriad of types of images presented in the data so when posters tagged self-harm in their image it did not necessarily provide information about what type of self-harm, if any, the poster was engaging with.

Other forms of self-harm depicted included eating disorders, bruising, scratching, substance use and suicide references. Other studies on self-harm and social media have also found that cutting is most common form of self-harm presented (Seko, 2013; Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010). However, it is important to note that this could be dictated by the sample. Perhaps unsurprisingly, self-injury is prevalent in studies on visual mediums as it is more of a visual act. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that it is the most common type of self-harm. Research suggests that different types of self-harm are more prevalent in different samples (i.e. cutting more in community samples and self-poisoning more in hospital samples) (Madge, et al., 2008; Gunnell et al , 2014). We also know that individuals use multiple methods across different episodes (Whitlock, Eckenrode, & Silverman, 2006; Madge, et al., 2008; Laye-Gindhu & Schonert-Reichl, 2005). Therefore the key message is that in focussing on just one sample or one population it is possible to miss the complexity of peoples' experience of self-harm.

The results also suggested that the visual medium shaped the way people posted and increased the likelihood that images of self-injury were presented more than other forms of self-harm. This is an important finding from this study. Images on social media privileged self-injury as cuts are visual in a way that other types of self-harm are not (e.g. overdose of pills).

When self-injury was depicted it was commonly on the arm or leg and portrayed moderate self-injury. It is interesting to note that there were no explicitly shocking photographs of severe mutilation (e.g.. skin cut to the bone, deep cuts in faces) suggesting there may be implicit cultural norms within the social media sites, or that the images had been moderated, either by the site or by the community. However, the drawings represented

more severe and explicit mutilation which could suggest that drawn self-injury is more likely to be presented as more severe. There were images of direct self-injury across all the sites, but as noted from the cross site analysis, there were some qualitative differences in the cuts. A number of cuts presented patterning on the skin, where it appeared that the cutting had been more controlled. For those who were engaged in very controlled, small, lined patterned cuts there may have been something in the way that they were focussing which was providing relief, that is different to commonly cited reasons for cutting (e.g. to see blood or to feel pain) (Glenn & Klonsky, 2010). It could be that by intricately focussing on one area of the body they were shutting down other thoughts, similar to how mindfulness drawing may be hypothesised to work by focussing the attention on an intricate task (Greenhalgh, 2016). This could also suggest differences in the function of this type of self-injury and possibly different responses in terms of intervention.

There were interesting differences across the platforms, with Twitter containing the lowest number of images containing direct self-harm. Instagram and Tumblr, however, presented a similar number suggesting that they are platforms that posters may utilise more for sharing their own self-injury.

The images that presented a person were heavily skewed towards young white women. We know that, for Instagram and Tumblr at least, the majority of users are female and between the ages of 16-24 (Statista, 2014; York, 2017). Therefore the images could be more of a representation of the fact that it is younger females who are posting images. It could also speak to how gender is represented online generally, which will be discussed further. Men or people of colour were not prevalent in the data set. As discussed in Chapter One, research appears to be skewed towards representations of young white young women engaging in self-harm (Brickman, 2004) and yet we know that there is broader representation of people who engage in self-harm (Dickson, et al., 2011). This raises interesting questions about site norms that will be explored further. However, it should be noted that as usernames or profiles were not explored, it could be that there was more diversity amongst those posting images.

A number of themes were identified that presented information about gender, identity, the function of self-harm, motivations and creations by posters. Instagram and Tumblr presented a number of shared themes and the results suggested that these sites may be more likely to be used by people who engage in self-harm, to represent and discuss their behaviour. Two of the predominant themes on Twitter ('Hive Mind' and 'Appropriation') were not evidenced on Instagram or Tumblr suggesting significant site differences. These will be discussed further.

Key Issues

Self-harm is addictive

There was a visual and textual narrative in the analysis that self-harm is viewed as an addiction. There were numerous references in the images where the language of addiction had been used to present images about self-harm across all three sites. This was presented in the themes of 'The Language of Addiction' on Instagram and Tumblr and 'Recovery' within Twitter. These included messages about self-harm being compulsive, that posters were attracted to self-harm and that they found the behaviour difficult to escape from or to change. There was a longing expressed through the images about the act of self-injury in particular that suggested some of the motivation for self-injury may be driven by the addiction to the act. So, although the addiction may not be the main function of the behaviour, it may have been exacerbating its endurance. This may link in with previous research identifying often overlooked positive functions of self-harm (Edmondson, Brennan & House, 2016). One of the positive functions of engaging in self-injury could be a reduction in the distress of thinking about self-injury or a reduction in the feelings of compulsion to engage in self-injury. A further positive function may be feelings of exhilaration following self-harm. Indeed there was one example within the images where a poster described positive feelings of calm after self-harm.

Nixon, Cloutier and Aggarwal (2002) explored addictive symptoms of self-injury in a sample of adolescents in hospital. Participants reported daily self-harm urges (that did not always correspond with the act) and that features of their self-injury were consistent with addictive behaviour (i.e. upsetting but not enough to stop, frequency increasing). Interestingly, another study found that self-injury was related to other addictive behaviours (drug abuse, disordered eating and sexual compulsivity) leading the authors to suggest the involvement of maladaptive strategies for emotional self-regulation in those that self-injure (MacLaren & Best, 2010). Indeed, there are studies exploring emotional regulation and self-harm behaviour (Linehan, 1993; Gratz, 2007) which suggest that emotional dysregulation is involved in self-harm as those that engage in it use it as an emotional regulation strategy when they are distressed. Emotional dysregulation in these studies is defined as maladaptive ways in which people respond to emotions and difficulties in controlling behaviours in the face of emotional distress (Gratz & Tull, 2010). The results of this study could indicate potential avenues for future research around how emotional regulation is involved in the addictive act of self-injury.

Linking in with the 'Language of Addiction' there was a strong theme of recovery across all sites. As noted in the content and thematic analysis, there were qualitative differences in how these were presented across the three sites, with Twitter presenting more

celebratory style and positive images. 'Recovery' images across the three sites would often appear to be memorialising a poster's recovery. Some used pre and post imagery to underscore the change in their lives or used celebratory images about the activities they are able to do now they no longer engage in self-harm (e.g. drawing, seeing friends). Interestingly, in the recovery images there was a higher representation of what are assumed to be posters' faces, compared to images which portrayed direct self-harm (e.g. cuts to skin or images of thinness). This could mean that recovery is a more socially acceptable message to present to the world. There may be a function of posting recovery images to present how strong the poster is to overcome their difficulties.

These results suggested then that a common motivation for posting messages about self-harm is to share narratives about the addictive aspect of it and to share stories of recovery or struggles with recovery.

The link between addiction and self-harm was an important finding in this study and will be explored further in terms of clinical implications.

The centrality of the (female) body

There were strong messages about the body in the data, with the way posters chose to present themselves providing strong messages about their self-harm, their feelings and their identity.

As noted in the content analysis, when a person was represented it was predominantly female, across all three sites. However messages about the body were particularly apparent across Instagram and Tumblr where major themes of 'Gender' and 'Body Image' were presented. The female body and how it was presented was central to images on these sites.

This section discusses how the body was used to present self-injury wounds, to present sexualised imagery and to present thinness.

Self-injury on the body

In terms of self-injury on the body, as seen in the cross-site analysis, all sites presented images of direct self-injury, which was typically in the form of cutting to an arm. This supports previous research on common wound locations in self-injury (Duffy, 2006). Interestingly, although there were images of cuts to the torso and other parts of the body, there was only one image of self-injury to the breast area (which was just underneath) on Tumblr, and none to the genital area. Research has highlighted gender differences in location of self-injury with females more likely to cut and scratch the arms and legs and males more likely to burn and hit and also cause damage to the chest, face or genitals (Sornberger, Heath, Toste, & McLouth, 2012). Research has also suggested that injuries inflicted to the breast or genital area may indicate greater psychological disturbance

(Whitlock, 2010). Therefore, it could be that the results from this study indicate a higher proportion of females presenting their self-injury, even when it was impossible to identify the gender due to the closeness of the cuts. The results could also indicate that those who were posting did not have a high level of psychological disturbance, which supports the finding above that there were no images of severe mutilation within the results, which could indicate more severe distress. This could also be due to site structural restrictions. It is noted that for Instagram there are community guidelines that do not allow for the posting of nudity (Instagram, 2017c) therefore it could be that breast or genital cutting were moderated and removed from the site, or that posters self-moderated due to the restrictions. However, as discussed posters to Instagram had found ways to circumvent restrictions. However, there were still no images on Instagram that alluded to breast or genital cutting. Tumblr do allow the posting of sexual content but ask that posters mark it as such (Tumblr, 2017b). As noted in the content analysis there was only one picture of a breast which it was on Tumblr. Although unexplored in this study, each image is linked to an individual poster, even if that poster uses a pseudonym. Thus there could be implicit site norms where posters do not share these types of images, or do not want to be identified sharing these more explicit images.

Images of direct self-injury tended to be close ups of the body part, anonymised from the person. This presented an interesting juxtaposition of images of a behaviour that is commonly defined as private (e.g. cutting), shared on a public forum. The apparent anonymity in the way posters framed their self-injury could potentially be explained by the study by Rodham et al (2016) who found that those posting content online about self-harm were doing so using pseudonyms in order to maintain "secret" behaviour. This was an interesting finding of the study. As described above, recovery messages were often celebratory in nature and contained images of posters engaging in joyful events now they no longer engaged in self-harm. Here, however, cuts were presented close up and anonymised from the person. The message that could be taken from this is that current self-harm is stigmatised, whilst recovery messages are glorified.

In posting images of self-injury, seemingly straight after cutting, the posters were letting us (the viewer) into what they are doing to their bodies. They are letting the viewer experience the rawness of the wounds that they are inflicting on their bodies. The literature on embodiment is important here which suggests that self-injury is a way to embody people's lived experience thus, abuse, distress, rejection, and torment are represented on the skin. Embodiment theories suggest our bodies tell the stories of our existence in ways that we are unable to articulate verbally (Krieger, 2005) therefore in a simplistic form self-harm is the embodiment of inner pain (McAndrew & Warne, 2005; Chandler, 2012) where people use their bodies to reflect crisis between the physical and their psychological self (Jeffreys, 2000). Indeed, there were images in the sample where posters had carved words into their

skin such as "fat", consequently injuring their skin with the words they feel inside. Studies exploring how sex workers embodied their experiences found that they were using self-harm as a way to exercise power within their difficult circumstances, which reflected the abuse from others by placing it within the body (Coy, 2009). Therefore, the raw images of close up self-injury showing new wounds could be a way for posters to present to others their embodied pain.

Sexualised and thin bodies

Another key message about the body in this study is around the use of sexualised imagery and the presentation of idealised thin bodies.

The use of sexualised images of females was noted, particularly on Tumblr and Instagram. These were presented both as what could be described as "typically" glamourous images, i.e. thin females in their underwear, thin females in the bath, and thin females posed in sexual ways. There were also examples of sexualised images that were subverted (i.e. not typically sexual). These images made a powerful statement on what posters felt comfortable showing on social media. Arguably with the rise of celebrity selfie culture, these types of images are ubiquitous, for example the constant stream of sexualised images, from celebrities such as the Kardashians. So, it is perhaps not surprising that posters were re-creating those images on their own accounts. However, what was surprising is the link with messages of self-harm. The sexualised posts were tagged as self-harm suggesting that posters are sexualising self-harm. Perhaps by making it more attractive, it can be made more palatable.

It could be that posters were sexualising this behaviour, or it could be that this is how they commonly post and would therefore post images of self-harm in the same way. Motz (2008) describes how women locate their sense of identity in their bodies. Therefore, any anger, contempt, shame or distress is expressed through self-injury, symbolising psychological pain. She suggests that there may be a sexual component to this, that the act itself provides a release from tension similar to that of an orgasm (Motz, 2008). There is not a wide literature linking sexualisation and self-harm. However, there is a wealth of literature on the sexualisation of the female body (Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Renold & Ringrose, 2011). This study did not seek to explore in any depth the sexualisation of the female form and yet the results presented evidence that often when female bodies were on show, even if they were on show to portray self-harm, they were presented in a sexualised way. This may be part of the cultural context as sexualised images are ubiquitous on social media or it could indeed be that the expression of self-harm visually allows for a sexual tension release as Motz (2008) describes.

It could be argued that the sexualisation of these images goes hand in hand with the gendered nature of the images. In mass media it tends to be the female body that is objectified (Barber, 2011; Heldman, 2014) therefore social media will be a reflection of this. However, it is also interesting to wonder about the pressures placed on users to present themselves in certain ways. Research has found that young women feel pressure to present themselves as physically attractive (Livingstone, 2008) as well as being rewarded for sexualised photographs and messages of promiscuity (Manago et al., 2008). Thus, the sexualised images posted in this study could have been posted as a response to the pressures the posters' felt in conforming to presenting themselves in sexualised and attractive ways.

Not all of the images that portrayed the female form were typically glamorous in nature. There was a theme around 'Subverted Glamour' in Instagram and Tumblr. These were images which appeared sexualised in nature and yet were subverted in some way, i.e. by showing old underwear, or "tomboy" underwear. These images were still portraying the female form and yet could be argued that they were making a statement against the sexualisation of the female form. In presenting their bodies in a non-typical, non-stereotyped way they are using their agency to portray their form in a way of their choosing. However, it is still interesting to note that all the subverted images still contained white thin women. There were no images of women of colour or those who were overweight. Perhaps subverting glamour can only go so far.

In discussing the way that females were presenting themselves on Tumblr and Instagram, it could be argued that the posters' on these sites felt free to present themselves in any way they wished to be viewed. Therefore, the images they posted were a reflection of their true selves. However, there are other ways to view this data which utilise feminist theories and should be the focus of further research specifically with a population who present self-harm online.

It was interesting to draw on the work of Judith Butler who is a feminist theorist concerned with the formation of the sexed and gendered subject within a power structure (Van House, 2011). Butler (1988) argued that identity and gender are not inherent but rather a changing cultural construction that is performed. She argued that gender was constructed through relations of power and through the constraints placed on people through the various power structures of which people are part. Therefore, if gender is culturally constructed then individual agency is impossible, thus gender and identity are performative, as they are both a result of given discourses. Butler stated that performativity is not an intentional act but rather a product of power structures. Relating this to social media, Bonanno (2014) positions identity and gender to be performatively constituted on social media.

Van House (2011) utilised Butler's theories of performativity, amongst others, to present an understanding of social networking sites. Van House (2011) argued that social

networking sites are powerful sites of performativity. Users will describe and categorise themselves either explicitly or implicitly through the choices they make in terms of their profiles and what they like and share. Van House (2011) argued that we need to be aware of the assumptions we make in terms of how people are able to present themselves on social media and how technology affects peoples' identity.

Bonanno (2014) utilised Butler's theories to present an argument that the structure of social media, i.e. the way in which they push people to define themselves in certain ways (gender, relationship, age, location), ultimately benefits the owners of the sites rather than the people using them. There are clear arguments for this which include the increase in concerns about how the owners or corporations of social media sites use data from its service users (Luckerson, 2014; Garside, 2015). Bonanno (2014) argued that social media creates the illusion of agency in how you present yourself but in reality people are subjected to complex structures and therefore cannot present themselves freely. Thus perhaps some caution should be taken in the assumption that social media could be a positive experience (even for those who find it so) if by its very nature it is exploitative.

In relation to this study, it suggests that the high visibility of the female form and the themes around gender, the body and how people present themselves could all be understood using theories of performativity. In addition to this understanding, it is clear that there are dominant structures in place (social structures rather than technological structures) where people's identities on social media are co-created through site norms. If those site user norms place value on sexualised images, images of the female body, thinness and "whiteness" then this is the way in which females then present themselves. Indeed, one study, from a social identity perspective, found that even anonymous communications online are governed by group norms (Spears, Postmes, Lea, & Wolbert, 2002). Therefore, females who did not fit the construction of gender found in the data for this study perhaps felt restricted to post. This may mean that others who used the sites but did not fit in with the prevalent construction of gender and identity chose to post images that did not identify their differences. This could potentially be supported by the number of different types of imagery, including text, chosen to represent messages about self-harm. For example, if an overweight woman of colour wanted to represent their self-harm on Instagram and yet could not find any images of people who looked like her, how likely would she be to post an image of herself?

Social media is used to express and share distress (and other feelings)

The results suggested social media sites were utilised by those who engage in self-harm to express and share their experiences, their distress and their emotional pain in a variety of ways.

The novel aspect of this study, applying stated tone and stated purpose to the content analysis, suggests that sharing feelings was one of the most common reasons why people were posting on social media, across all sites. This was especially apparent in the themes of 'Motivation' and 'Articulated Distress' on Instagram and Tumblr. There were noteworthy site differences. Instagram and Tumblr both presented "Sadness" as the most commonly stated emotional tones, whereas on Twitter the most commonly stated tones were "Anger" and "Happy". This was an interesting finding and could perhaps suggest that posters access different sites depending on how they were feeling. Indeed, Adler and Adler (2007) found that people who utilise social media sites moved between them. Therefore, it could be that the same poster chose to post different types of messages on the different sites they utilised or it could be that posters chose a single site to post on depending on their visual and emotional style.

Instagram and Tumblr present more negatively toned posts. It was clear that posters were experiencing distress, around their cutting, in trying to recover, in their relationships, with their mental health and in their attempting to communicate with others. Although these were presented in distinct themes, emotional distress was seen across all themes. This links to the literature that alleviating emotional distress is an often cited function of self-harm (Klonsky D. , 2007; Suyemoto, 1998). It could be interpreted that posters were wanting to let others know about their distress so viewers could understand their pain. Letting people know what was causing or triggering self-harm, to see what was "behind" the behaviour was one of the motivations found for posting online about self-harm by by Seko, Kidd, Wiljer and McKenzie (2015).

Despite it being clear that social media sites were utilised to share distress it was also apparent that representing distress and self-harm behaviour was difficult. Images were often ambiguous in nature and included a mix of quotes, objects, selfies, portraits, text and drawings. Posters used a variety of ways to express how they were feeling.

There was a high proportion of text images noted on all three sites, although fewer on Twitter. Yet, Twitter had a higher proportion of mixed text and picture images (which included news articles).

There were noteworthy differences between platforms with Instagram and Tumblr presenting a higher number of negative text images. Twitter, however, presented more diversity with similar amounts of positive, negative and ambiguous text images. On Twitter, text images were commonly used to inform others and to reach out. This was often in the form of shared articles, advice and other types of informaton. These were qualitatively different to Instagram and Tumblr where text images were predominantly negative quotes and copied words from others. It appeared that negative text was used to represent the

feelings of the poster. This suggests that posters looked to identify words that they identified with in order to express their feelings.

The overwhelming use of text images in the data suggests self-harm was a difficult and complex concept to express visually for the posters and raises interesting questions about methods of self-harm. It could be possible that those engaging with types of self-harm that are difficult to capture visually, such as cuts, could be using words instead. For example, for those who self-poisoned, arguably difficult to photograph, words could have been used instead to describe their pain rather than their behaviour. The results suggest that using someone else's words to describe a poster's distress appeared to be a way to express their feelings. There could be many reasons why posters did this. An argument could be made that in using the words of others, posters were distancing themselves from their emotions. In sharing the words of others, posters could be protecting themselves from presenting their own vulnerabilities; perhaps the words of others are more palatable. It could also be argued that the sharing of others' words could be a way for the poster to feel understood. If someone else has been able to articulate their distress then it is possible that the feelings the posters were experiencing were not unique. Perhaps there was some solace in identifying with shared distress.

Another creative way that posters used to express representations about self-harm and emotions was through drawings or creations. As was presented in the content analysis all sites contained drawings or creations. These were explicitly detailed in the themes of 'Drawn Self-Harm' in Twitter and Tumblr, as these two sites presented more drawings than Instagram.

There were some drawn images where the function of substitution was explicitly stated. In these cases drawing self-injury could have had a therapeutic effect for posters. By visually seeing blood in drawn form the posters could potentially experience a similar release, similar to seeing blood in live form following cutting (Glenn & Klonsky, 2010). Indeed, numerous self-help guides have detailed the act of drawing as a way to prevent self-harming behaviour (HelpGuide.Org, 2017).

Other characterisations were less explicit. There appeared to be something sexy and attractive about self-harm in the way that was presented in drawings, where they would often depict a "darker" vision of humanity. There were also numerous sexualised drawings of self-harm. These depictions suggest that self-harm could be used as a plot device in a character story that would make the story more interesting and exciting. There were also a number of symbolic references, to religion or to popular culture (e.g. Kylo from Star Wars).

Drawn images often presented more severe self-harm. There were several images where the character has large slashes in their bodies, or where their throats were slit. This could suggest that such extreme self-injury could be part of a fantasy the poster has about

their own self-injury, where their character can engage in a severe expression of feelings that the poster cannot do to themselves.

Similar to the ways in which others' words are used, drawings could also have been used as a way to distance the poster from their own self-harm behaviour. Drawing self-harm could have been a socially acceptable way of expressing pain and suffering that is less intense for others than viewing direct self-injury. Equally, posters, in creating characters that engage in self-harm, could be another way of remaining anonymous online.

As discussed, there was a myriad of ways in which posters represented their feelings. This study has contributed to the discussions around self-harm and the many ways in which people clearly struggled to articulate their experiences (McAllister, 2003). Posters attempted to find ways to represent their experiences in the spaces that they used socially, through the use of others' words or through drawings and creations.

Belonging and not belonging

Ideas around belonging were common in the data. Identity was a major theme on Instagram which encompassed explicit messages about identity and belonging within or outside certain groups. Yet there were messages of belonging throughout the data set - images of thin, idealised and sexualised bodies, conforming to what is typically attractive. Posters utilised tags with counter culture references to state that they "belonged" to a different sub-culture (i.e. #BMTH, #EMO, #secretsociety123 #goth) alongside hashtags where posters appeared to be referencing their mental health difficulties (#anxiety, #BPD, #depression) which were again indicative of belonging to a group that experienced difficulties. Posters also utilised images as a way to connect with others and would caption their images with discussion points or questions suggesting that one of the functions was to connect with others who perhaps shared their experiences. Indeed, connection with others is a commonly cited reason for accessing social media (Seko, Kidd, Wiljer, & McKenzie, 2015; Adler & Adler, 2011). There were also examples where representations of self-harm were used playfully or in a way to suggest that those who engage in self-harm are part of a group or deviant sub-culture (e.g. lists of deviant behaviours). In opposition to this there were also messages from posters stating that they felt excluded from society and that they did not feel they had a place anywhere. Finally, there were also emotive messages about loneliness.

This is an interesting finding of the study that suggested posters are accessing social media as a way to develop a sense of their identity in terms of their self-harm and where they fit in with others who also engage in this behaviour. In line with Manago et al (2008) posters could be using social media sites as a way to develop their identity, and that although posters were finding difficulty in expressing self-harm, they could be trying out

various "selves". Van Dijick (2008) posited that with increasing technological changes (the use of smartphones and digital photography) the meaning of taking photographs has changed from an act of memory and retaining family heritage to becoming a tool for both identity formation for an individual and communication. The results from this study suggest that alongside posting images to document posters' lives, the images also presented ways in which posters were testing out their identity and their sense of self to develop an understanding of where they fit within communities online.

<u>To post was to document experiences</u>

Images found across the three sites suggested that one of the possible functions for posting images was to diarise posters lives. As discussed, posters were utilising social media to memorialise what they had done to their bodies. By posting their behaviour posters were both keeping a record of it and letting others view a glimpse of their experiences. Posters were also memorialising recovery from self-harm using before and after imagery and images of what activities they could now engage in now they no longer self-harmed. These examples presented ways in which posters used social media to document their self-harm experiences and activities. However, there were also numerous images that presented what could be described as the mundanity in posters' lives. People were shown engaging in everyday activities: in their bathrooms; in their bedrooms; going on trips; with friends; recovering; struggling and celebrating. Images could be viewed as documenting posters' daily lives.

Thus it could be argued that in contrast to how some might assume the posting of self-harm imagery is deviant and unusual, it might be that pictures of self-harm, emotions, stress, and distress, are part of the ways in which posters diarise all of the facets of their lives. They are documenting not just their self-harm, but everything about their life. This is supported by Seko et al (2015) who found that social media sites were a convenient repository for personal memories and documenting experiences in those that engaged in self-harm.

<u>Different sites for different messages</u>

The results suggested that there were site differences across the three platforms. The content analysis and thematic analysis present interesting differences across the sites. The most notable differences were seen on Twitter compared to Instagram and Tumblr.

In terms of stated purpose, Twitter presented a higher proportion of images whose purpose was to "Inform Others", "Reach out" or "Share Recovery". These results suggested that in terms of users' purpose for posting, Twitter was being used for interaction, for reaching out to people and for promoting positive stories. The content analysis also highlighted that there was less ambiguity in terms of posters' stated purpose on Twitter suggesting that the messages were more straight forward and clear compared to Instagram

and Tumblr where images were more ambiguous or less easily pinned down to a certain purpose.

Researchers have argued that Twitter is more akin to a traditional news media due to it containing a very low level of reciprocity (where those you follow, follow back) with over 65% of users not followed by any of the people they were following (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). They conclude that Twitter is utilised more as a source of information. This may explain the content and thematic differences noted on Twitter compared to the other two sites and may suggest that posters who want to share more emotive content may utilise Instagram and Tumblr more. This may be due to there being a, perceived or actual, greater sense of community in terms of levels of interaction.

All sites were used to "share feelings" although there were considerably more of these images on Tumblr, suggesting perhaps that Tumblr was a site used to express more emotional content. An interesting study exploring sentiment on Tumblr found that posts that contained images expressed more emotion overall and more intense emotions (Bourlai & Herring, 2014) suggesting that my results may be a function of accessing posts with images.

Tumblr presented the highest number of images where the stated purpose was to share feelings and the emotional tone was sadness suggesting that this site is utilised more for sharing distress in this subject.

Instagram presented the highest number of direct photography images, perhaps unsurprisingly as Instagram was set up to be a photograph sharing site. However, Instagram was also the only site where self-harm content was explicitly restricted and therefore users had to find ways to circumvent these restrictions.

As discussed, there were clear thematic differences between the sites with again Twitter presenting themes that were not identified on Tumblr or Instagram, those of 'Hive Mind' and 'Appropriation'. 'Appropriation' was an interesting theme as it suggested that those posting about self-harm within this theme were likely not engaging in self-harm.

Structural site constraints have been discussed but it is likely that the norms within each of the sites analysed would lend posters to both utilise the different social media sites and present images in the way that they did. As noted, the site exploration was not an in depth analysis and thus these findings are presented tentatively.

Strengths and Limitations

This study was a novel exploration of images posted to three social media platforms. Due to this there were a number of strengths and limitations to the study.

This study was the first of its kind, to my knowledge, to explore images of self-harm across a number of social media platforms. Therefore, it has offered a unique contribution to

the literature around self-harm and its depiction on social media. This was a key strength of this study.

Due to it being exploratory in nature, it was not restrictive in terms of inclusion criteria, thus images were included that posters tagged as self-harm rather than posts that I "read" as self-harm. This allowed for a broader range of posts that people named as self-harm to be included despite them perhaps not containing explicit self-harm imagery. This allowed for a broader understanding of how posters themselves, presumably the majority of whom were engaging in self-harm, viewed this behaviour, and thus how we as clinicians could support those who engage in self-harm. However, this brought challenges when considering the wider analogical use of the term self-harm for social acts (e.g. Brexit).

A significant strength of this study were the results from the intercoder reliability check (Chapter Three) that suggested the coding frame was accurate and the results could be replicated.

Although this study has contributed to the scant knowledge base of how people represent self-harm on social media there were also a number of limitations to this study.

Firstly, it should be noted that this was an ambitious study that explored broad data across three sites. Decisions that were taken to ensure that this study was suitable for an exploratory clinically relevant project meant that there were inevitable limitations. In exploring 602 images for content, themes and differences across sites it meant that there was a trade-off of being unable to do a "deep" close reading of a smaller number of images that would have allowed for greater interpretation. Rather, I was interested in what was typically posted on popular social media sites as this was a new area of study for clinical psychology.

A significant limitation was the lack of information gathered about the posters. This meant that I was not able to develop a typology of those who were posting the images I was analysing. In not analysing the posters themselves I was unable to identify whether their posts about self-harm were typical, whether they were prolific posters and were part of a community, information about whether they self-harmed (from previous posts) or whether their representation of self-harm was typical or unusual. Other studies have shown that an actor type analysis of those who are posting onto social media can provide another level of depth to understanding a particular issue (Procter, Vis, & Voss, 2013; Lotan, et al., 2011). It is suggested that this should be the focus of future research.

Another limitation is the way in which I chose to collect the data. I elected to engage in a manual extraction of images from all three sites using the in-site search function and the hashtag of self-harm or word self-harm. This allowed me to develop greater familiarity with the data as I was saving the images and I began to develop an idea of what was posted immediately. An alternative way that I could have extracted the data was to use an Application Programming Interface (API) where most social media platforms make some of

their data publicly available (Vis, 2013). Using a programme that communicated with the sites' APIs could have supported me to collect a large number of posts, including all the poster data, and stored them together. Bruns and Burgess (2011) argued that the lack of a standard set of communicative measures and metrics across different studies of Twitter hinders the ability to compare findings and generate more scientific approaches to social media study. Therefore, although a manual extraction of the data was preferable for my individual analysis, utilising platform APIs could have made this study more robust in its methodological approach.

A further limitation is related to the sample size. This study allowed me to look at a snapshot of approximately 200 images on each platform from a specific point in time. This is a small number of images compared to the hundreds of thousands of images posted about self-harm. These images are not representative of self-harm images in general, however I would expect that if the sample was collected again there would be similar types of images observed. In addition to this, it may be likely that the platforms themselves may have changed (e.g. Instagram shutting down more hashtags) if the study were to be repeated.

Finally, it is important to note what I have brought to the analysis. Images are polysemic in nature. Text is polysemic but with text there is an established meaning for each word, if not for the way it was used (Gleeson, 2010). Images bring their own challenges. As described in Chapter Two, I analysed the images through a lens of my own experiences. Therefore, the interpretations I have made will be different than the interpretations others could make as it is impossible to separate the researcher from the analysis. As discussed, there were quality checks in place to ensure that themes were understandable and linked to the images, however, it is acknowledged that this study was based on one person's interpretations, albeit with a great deal of discussion with supervisors.

This study did not aim to be generalizable to the population of those who self-harm. However, I would argue that the results from this study are transferable to the context of how people use social media (particularly image sharing social media) to talk about self-harm, although further research should be undertaken.

Clinical Implications

This exploratory study provided some insight into what was typically posted onto popular social media platforms referencing self-harm. This section will firstly explore the clinical implications in terms of new understandings of self-harm and social media and the impact, followed by implications for how psychologists work clinically, and will then go on to discuss the implications for clinical psychologist's involvement with social media.

Understanding of self-harm and social media

The analysis suggests that clinicians should not be overly anxious about what is being posted onto social media. Although there were a few posts suggesting self-injury was attractive (in terms of how the cuts looked) there were no posts that were supportive or could be viewed as promoting self-harm behaviour. Rather, the sites were being used to express feelings and difficult emotions in a variety of creative ways, including offering inspiration to others through the form of texts or shared messages about recovery. There were also examples of how images were being shared to offer an alternative for self-harming or to offer advice to others. This should allay some of the fears of those who are concerned about social contagion and the use of social media to persuade others to self-harm (Lewis & Baker, 2011; Duggan & Whitlock, 2012; Lewis, Heath, Denis, & Noble, 2010). However, responses to the images posted were not explored in this study so it cannot speak to how others may respond. It should also be noted that community guidelines of each site restrict content that could be seen as glorifying self-harm so it is possible that if there were any glorifying posts they would not have ended up in the sample.

Posters used a variety of tags to express their feelings, including a mix of mental health tags. The diversity of ways in which posters described their self-harm suggests that arbitrary distinctions between self-harm and other mental health difficulties might not be helpful. Posters were linking self-harm to depression, eating disorders, sadness, suicide, and anxiety to name a few. Posters, and in turn those engaging in self-harm, therefore did not fit neatly into our clinical definitions. This supports the literature suggesting that self-harm is more complicated than intent and there can be ambiguity, in one episode as well as across repeated episodes (Edmondson, Brennan, & House, 2016). This suggests that we need to ensure that we consider complexity when exploring self-harm experiences. For clinicians, this suggests that we need to align with more transdiagnostic forms of assessment as this study shows that those experiencing difficulties do not fit neatly into diagnostic boxes.

A key lesson for clinicians is related to how we perceive self-harm in others. Each person will view self-harm from their own perspective. I had some surprising and interesting reactions to some of the images. In particular, I was not expecting to feel irritated by superficial self-injury. In my clinical life I do not experience (or maybe defend against the experience) irritation and wonder if this is a reflection of the therapeutic relationship I have with those people I see with superficial self-injury, thus when I see it detached from the person I have less empathy. Therefore I believe it is imperative for clinicians to reflect on their own reactions to self-harm and to spend some time thinking about what their beliefs are about the motivations and function of self-harm. In addition to this, this study highlighted how difficult it is for people to communicate their experiences. Posters utilise

strategies such as minimising, denying pain, exaggerating, making jokes, dark humour and presenting as seeking response from others in order to share their feelings. These strategies need to be understood by clinicians as under the broader umbrella of ways in which people express difficult and complex emotions, as people can stigmatise without this understanding.

<u>Working clinically</u>

Alongside the desire to gain a deeper understanding of how images posted onto social media sites could inform the self-harm literature, as a psychologist in clinical training I was also interested in the impact on clinical work that this study could bring. The analysis suggested that posting onto social media provided therapeutic support for people. There were posts which detailed this explicitly such as vent art, but there were also posts which suggested that by posting the person is experiencing some benefit or relief. This suggested social media sites were a potential avenue for offering support to those engaging in self-harm and should be explored further from a clinical perspective to understand what the benefits are. However, this avenue might only be true for those who are part of the social group utilising social media, rather than, for example, an older adult who does not utilise social media. Thus the focus of this would be on those who use social media.

The results from this study suggest that clinicians should be having conversations about social media with clients who engage in self-harm. It is suggested that this should be conducted in ways that open up conversations about social media use, rather than in looking to restrict or heavily moderate social media use as suggested in others' studies (Lewis & Baker, 2011).

It is clear that those posting images benefit in some way from the posting. Therefore, the following recommendations are presented for clinicians working with those who engage in self-harm:

- It is recommended that as part of a psychological assessment, questions are asked about social media use in relation to self-harm, particularly if the client is an adolescent
- Clinical conversations should focus on the following areas:
    - Whether the client is accessing social media sites that present images of self-harm
    - Does the client post images that relate to their self-harm
    - What the client finds helpful in relation to their social media use and their self-harm, both in terms of what they post and what they view from others

- o Do they find social media sites to be supportive and does this have any effect on their engagement of self-harm
- o Whether the content of social media is upsetting to clients, and if so, what is it about the posts they are seeing that have this effect
- o What are they hoping to gain from accessing social media sites and are there any lessons or strategies that are helpful that could be used in other areas of their lives

These clinical discussions about social media can also allow for some focussed questioning about related issues that may not have been covered by the assessment, for example; eating disorders, feelings about the body, gender and sexuality.

The results from this study highlight the types of images that people accessing social media for self-harm purposes might observe. Therefore further recommendations for clinicians are to:

- Develop an awareness about the range of images on social media, that their clients may observe
- Reflect on the impact of these images on their own feelings about self-harm and create some space to explore their own emotions
- Be mindful of clients' relationships with their social media accounts and communites and how these may provide a level of support or comfort that clients are unable to access "offline"

A crucial, but more general, lesson that can be taken from this research is that we as clinicians need to find more creative and adaptive ways, besides standard face to face interviews, for people to express themselves. Popular interventions, particularly with adolescents, are Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approaches. This type of approach encourages literalism, i.e. you work with and accept the person's specific thoughts. The results from this study suggest that people are finding creative ways to express themselves visually because self-harm is a difficult experience to articulate and is complex. It could be that supporting adolescents to engage in more creative therapies that could be more interpretative, would allow them to explore experiences that are difficult to articulate, which self-harm clearly fits into this category.

Finally, the analysis suggests that the language of addiction is utilised by those posting about self-harm. Consideration should be given to the addiction literature, particularly around recovery, to see if there are any ideas that can be drawn from the successes of the addictions movement. Some studies have shown that internet (text based therapy) and Apps have been proven effective for alcohol addiction and self-injurious behaviour (Blankers, Koeter, & Schippers, 2011; Franklin, et al., 2016).

Engagement with social media

This study has broader implications about how we, as clinical psychologists, engage in social media platforms. As explored in the introduction, social media sites are relatively new community spaces that are becoming the standard in terms of how people, particularly young people, interact. Mental health professionals are beginning to use these sites to connect with peers and other professionals (e.g. on Twitter) as well as to advertise their services (e.g. through business pages on Facebook). It is also widely acknowledged that consumers are looking online for health information, including information about mental health, therefore, we need to ensure that information available is accurate and professional and to be able to meet needs where they are being presented.

Kolmes (2012) noted that, with technology moving forward at such a pace, there are challenges for professionals in terms of how to interact with social networks as well as the ethical implications for how professional identities can be maintained with an online presence. Common concerns about online engagement relate to responding to messages when clinicians are not working, and concerns about therapeutic alliance in terms of feeling that therapeutic alliance cannot be as successful in a distance based relationship (Kolmes, 2012). In terms of therapeutic alliance it is possible that these concerns are culturally biased; it could be argued that children and adolescents who have grown up with digital media do not experience the same difficulties with connecting or making alliances on social media.

A recent systematic review found telepsychology services for children and adolescents yielded positive results for a range of psychiatric concerns using video conferencing, internet and telephone formats. In addition to this there were no differences found between these formats and face to face therapy (Slone, Reese, & McClellan, 2012).

Thus there could be scope for transferring our clinical skills into working within a social media space. There are several mental health organisations which have a presence online (CALM, 2017; Mind, 2017; Young Minds, 2017). What is more difficult to imagine is how therapeutic work could be delivered in social media. The Samaritans have offered email based and text based support which has been found to be valuable by those accessing the service, although there have been challenges such as perceived inconsistencies in the tone of email replies (Samaritans, 2017). However, the Samaritans do not engage in the same level of therapeutic intervention that psychologists do. Perhaps the safety messages that pop up when searching or posting about self-harm on social media sites offer enough information for those who need to access support. Indeed, not everyone who is posting about self-harm will require, or in fact wish for, therapeutic support.

Although further research needs to be done on social media for self-harm interventions, it is an important area for research and something that we, as psychologists,

need to start exploring further. If people, particularly young people, are accessing social media to talk about their self-harm then we might have an opportunity to offer more appropriate interventions before they need to access higher level mental health services.

Ideas for future research

This study should be viewed as an exploratory study and should be read taking the study limitations into account. It was not an in depth detailed analysis or close reading of a small number of images but rather a broad reading of 602 images as an initial foray into this widely used and popular medium.

There are numerous avenues for potential future research. One avenue would be to do a "deep" reading of a smaller number of images to identify any new themes around motivations for posting and the function of engaging in self-harm.

Although there is an emerging literature on posters who utilise social media to represent self-harm it could be a useful avenue to follow a small number of posters to understand why they post specific images. In this study I divorced the images from the posters and the context of their posting so it would be interesting to understanding their position in this. This could be in part a photo-elicitation study.

Linked to this, it would be interesting to develop an actor type analysis of posters of self-harm imagery to develop an understanding of who was posting about self-harm, whether they were part of a particular community of posters and whether they were regular posters. This could also explore the network aspect of social media to see who interacts with each other. By doing this type of research, those who were not "typical" posters could potentially be discounted to develop a more robust understanding of what those who self-harm are using social media for in relation to their behaviour.

An interesting theme of this study has been the link between images of self-harm and sexualised images of white females. One possible avenue to explore would be to focus on the use of sexualised self-harm images using feminist theories of the body and theories of performativity and power.

A final potential avenue of research would be to explore the interaction between those who post on social media about self-harm and their followers and commenters. This would allow for a deeper understanding of posters' motivations and whether this relates to the feedback they receive and how this links to their self-harm behaviour.

Conclusion

This exploratory novel study of images representing self-harm has supported the consideration of a number of key issues in relation to how posters were presenting images

tagged as self-harm. This study has contributed to the literature on self-harm and how this is represented visually.

The results suggested that posters were using a myriad of ways to represent self-harm and there were various motivations that were identified that suggested posters were using social media sites to document their lives, their self-harm experience, and to develop a sense of their own identity.

The issues under exploration in this study are complex. Self-harm is a complex behaviour that serves multiple functions both between and within acts and between and within those who engage in it. No one study captures the full totality of what a person is experiencing when they engage in self-harm, as this may change from act to act and time to time.

There were a number of interesting findings from this study and some key issues that have been raised: those around the presentation of the female body; those around addiction; and those around the conflict between hiding and showing, public and private spaces. As noted these findings were divorced from the posters and can only speak to the content and meaning of what was presented rather than from an analysis of the posters and any interactions from the images.

I have touched on a small sample from very specific sites that are predominantly used by adolescents and young adults therefore the results should be read with that in mind. However, in response to concerns around self-harm content being used to encourage others to engage in the act, the findings from this study did not support that assertion. The ideas around social media causing 'harm' are overstated and oversimplified, and I would tentatively suggest that there is no need for panic or undue concern from clinicians, which leads to an overwhelming focus on negative functions of social media use. Rather, the results suggested that sharing images on social media could provide a positive function for those engaging in self-harm. Results, however, should be interpreted with caution. As noted, the community guidelines for each site inhibit posts that could sensationalise self-harm.

There were interesting contradictory messages in the data. Posters had chosen not to restrict their content so they could be publicly searchable, and yet posters were presenting intimate images of themselves and their lives, their experiences and their feelings. There were also inherent contradictions in how people presented themselves. They were presenting some intimate images and yet were anonymising their faces and identities (through cropping their heads or through extreme close ups). The images were also clearly performative. Images appeared planned and staged to present a certain message, even if the message was ambiguous. Even images that presented distress and difficult feelings were performed, or were presented via text. That is not to state that the distress was not genuine, but rather there was thought given to how the feelings were presented to others. This performance and the

contradictory nature of using public spaces to posting intimate images speaks to the nature of the medium. Additionally, as discussed, the sites themselves restrict freedom and ensure people post in certain ways, through site restrictions and site norms. There is an illusion of freedom and yet the sites are controlled. Thus the performance could be as much related to individual site restrictions as well as the needs of the posters.

I also asked what the influence was of the social media platforms themselves. As discussed the medium shapes all content in a number of ways and imposes a way of communicating. There were clear platform differences which provided some sense of why posters may utilise Instagram and Tumblr differently than Twitter and that there perhaps were site norms that would influence how posters chose to present themselves, or not.

This is a new area of study and it is difficult to draw robust conclusions. However, the findings add to the exciting emerging literature on how self-harm is represented on social media. I was particularly looking at this study through the lens of being a psychologist, with a particular view about the nature of the problem. Clinicians need to be aware of what is represented on social media in order to have conversations about this with people that they are working with, and yet the results do not suggest that these conversations should be undertaken in order to impose restrictions on social media use due to it being harmful. Rather, these conversations should be focussing on possible positive functions of social media use for those engaging in self-harm. Additionally some thought should be given by clinicians around what is typically represented in the data (i.e. young white thin women) and how this may impact clients who do not fit within these categories.

Ultimately the images from this study suggests that social media sites are being used to present complex messages about self-harm and that social media sites are a place where posters are exploring how self-harm fits with their identity.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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Appendix One – Ethical Approval Form

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Faculty of Medicine and Health Research Office
School of Medicine Research Ethics Committee (SoMREC)

Room 10.111b, level 10
Worsley Building
Clarendon Way
Leeds, LS2 9NL
United Kingdom

✆ +44 (0) 113 343 1642

28 April 2016

Nicola Shanahan
Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
Leeds Institute of Health Sciences.
The University of Leeds
Charles Thackrah Building.
101 Clarendon Road
LEEDS LS2 9LJ

Dear Nicola

Ref no: **MREC15-092**

Title: **A picture paints a thousand words. Exploring images of self-harm posted on social media platforms**

Your research application has been reviewed by the School of Medicine Ethics Committee (SoMREC) and we can confirm that ethics approval is granted based on the following documentation received from you.

Document	Version	Date Submitted
MREC15-092 Ethical Review Form Completed	2.0	28/04/2016
Data Management Plan	1.0	22/03/2016
Fieldwork_Assessment_Form_low_risk_final_protected_nov_15	1.0	22/03/2016

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research ethics application or documentation. All changes must receive ethics approval prior to implementation. Please contact the Faculty Research Ethics Administrator for further information (fmhuniethics@leeds.ac.uk)

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

We wish you every success with the project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Roger Parslow
Co-Chair, SoMREC, University of Leeds

(Approval granted by Co-Chair Dr Roger Parslow on behalf of committee)

Appendix Two – Example of Thematic Analysis

Appendix Three – Risk Escalation Procedure
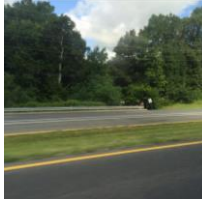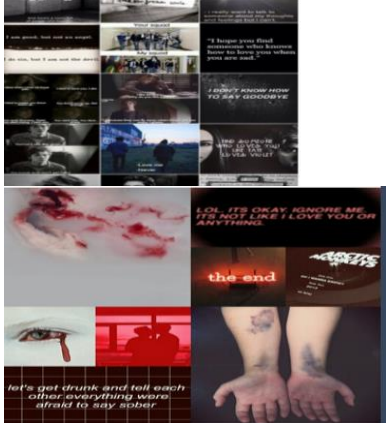
Additional Information	Risk escalation protocol for wellbeing of researcher.
relevant to the one working activity including existing control measures; information instruction and training received, supervision, security, increased lighting, emergency procedures, first aid provision etc.	This protocol was designed to demonstrate the steps taken in the unlikely event that the researcher becomes distressed as a result of surveying images of self-harm during the research process.
Risk Escalation Protocol]	1. Suspend research activity and seek immediate supervision
	2. Discuss the relevant issues with supervisors (where possible) and take appropriate / advised action
	3. Where supervision is not available seek immediate support from Clinical Doctorate in

	Psychology Programme tutors, Dr Fiona Thorne or course director, Dr Gary Latchford.
	4. Where necessary further support can also be sought from the researchers G.P / other identified health care professional or alternatively contact details for other relevant organistaions are detailed on the student wellbeing website (website)]
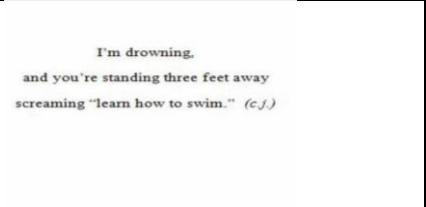
Residual Risk	Yes	[x]
Is the residual risk acceptable with the identified controls?	No	[ ]
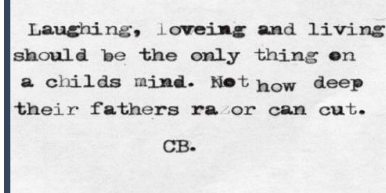
Assessment carried out by	Name:	[Nicola Shanahan]
	Signature:	[ ]
	Date:	[15/03/16]
Names of person(s) involved in Fieldwork N.B: This can take the form of a signed class register when large group work	Name:	[Nicola Shanahan]
	Signature:	[ ]
	Date:	[15/03/16]
Fieldwork Activity Organiser / Course Leader e.g. PI, etc	Name:	[Dr Cathy Brennan (Lead supervisor)]
	Signature:	CBrennan .
	Date:	[16th March 2016]
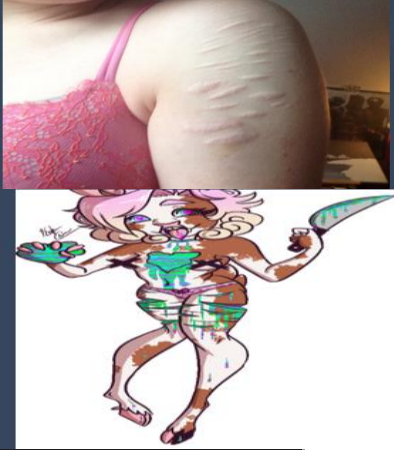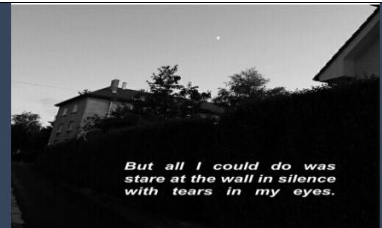
Appendix Four – Coding Frame

Category	Description	Example/s
Image Characteristics		
Type of Image		
Photograph	A single photograph image. This can be taken from a phone or a camera or other media device. This includes photographs with obvious filters.	
Photograph Collage	Where more than one photograph has been used to create an image	
Drawing	A drawing, cartoon, sketch, painting, or other created images that are not photographs	
Collage of images	Collage of different images that are not just photographs. For example a collage of photographs, stills from films and text images put together to create a post.	
Text image	An image where text is the main focus. For example where a quote is used on a colourful background. It is only a text image when there are only words represented.	"I hurt you, so I deserve to hurt myself too."
Mixed text and picture	Where the image is a mixture of image and text. For example when a news article has been shared or when there is a text conversation present with an image.	Requiring Britons to have entry visas would be an act of self-harm by the EU. Amber Rudd should say so
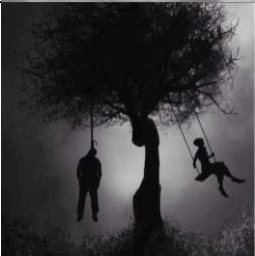
Other	Other characteristics not captured i.e. hieroglyphs, emoji images	
Photograph Characteristics		
Selfie	A selfie is a photograph that is taken of oneself. They are usually taken from within an arm's length of the person, and the image often includes the persons arm holding the camera. However, selfie's also include those taken with a "selfie stick" which can extend the reach of the device. A selfie can also be taken using a reflection, i.e. a mirror or a staged set-up. Selfie's can also include other people stood with or behind the main subject.	
Person pictures	Images of a person or people that are not selfie's.	
Photograph of objects	A photograph of an object, i.e. piece of fruit, weapon, lightshade, clock	
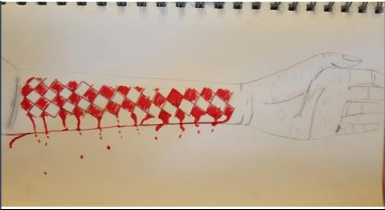
Famous / Celebrity Image	An image of a famous person or celebrity or still from a film with an actor.	
Close up	A close up of a body part	
Landscape	An image of a landscape	
Not photograph	All images that are not photographs, i.e. drawings	
Other		
Text Images		
Positive Text Image	A text based image that suggests a positive message. For example to inspire others, to offer hope, to present a positive future or to offer a joke or fun	
Negative Text Image	A text based image that suggests a negative message. For example texts that suggests the poster is in distress, is communicating a message of sadness or anger, or is communicating a message of despair.	
Ambiguous Text Image	A text based image that is ambiguous and cannot be coded into positive or negative.	
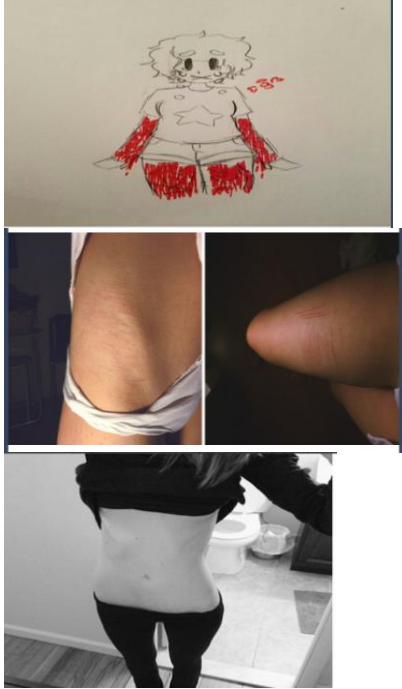
Other	All images that do not include text	
Gender		
Male	A male person. Whether this is represented in photographic form, a copied image or a drawn image including cartoons and sketches.	
Female	A female person. Whether this is represented in photographic form, a copied image or a drawn image including cartoons and sketches.	
Ambiguous gender	A person that is represented where it is unclear of their gender through observation. This also includes drawings or creations where there is character without a gender portrayed. This also includes images that may be of those who are transgender and going through a physical transition.	
Unidentified gender	An image of a person where the gender is not clear. For example in an image of a close up of an arm where it is impossible to identify whether the person is male or female. This also includes drawings or creations where there is character without a gender portrayed.	
Person not represented	An image where a person is not represented. For example an image that is of text.	
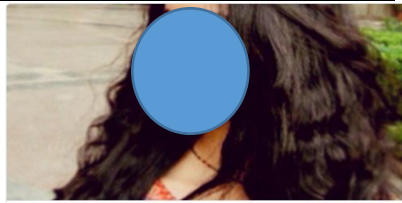
Mixed gender images	Images where more than one person is represented and there are both genders represented.	
Self-harm Characteris tics		
Self-Harm		
Present	When self-harm is present in the image. Including self-injury, eating disorders, alcohol or drug use, references to suicide. This can be in photographic form, or in drawn form, including cartoons and sketches. This also includes representations of self-harm, including blades, alcohol, scales etc. This also includes when a method of self-harm is presented in text form i.e. I cut myself, where no image of cut skin is represented.	
Absent	When self-harm of any kind is not represented in any form. This can include text that states "I hurt myself" but states no method. This can also include emotional pain. This also includes where self-harm is mentioned but in a way that suggests the text is relating to someone else, i.e. in messages where text asks people not to cut themselves.	
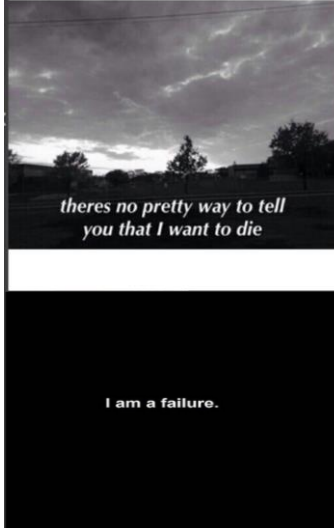
Method of Self-Harm		
Cutting	When cuts have been made to the skin with what looks like a knife, blade, or sharp object. Also when the implement of cutting is represented, for example with an image of a blade. Or when cutting is mentioned in an image that is text only.	
Scratching	When marks have been made to the skin from scratching, i.e. with fingernails or a compass, or when the implement of scratching is represented, i.e. a compass.	
Punching	Where knuckles are shown that have been grazed as if the person has punched a wall. Or when text states that the person has been punching.	
Bruising	Where bruising is shown on the skin or where a poster has written about bruising themselves. The method of bruising does not have to be identified, it could be punching, pinching, banging.	
Burning	When skin has been burnt, this could be through a lighter or cigarette burn or other hot object. Or when the implement of burning is represented, i.e. a lighter.	
Alcohol	When alcohol is represented relating to harm. This would be when someone is drinking alcohol or when alcohol is represented, i.e. a bottle of spirits.	
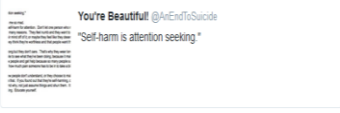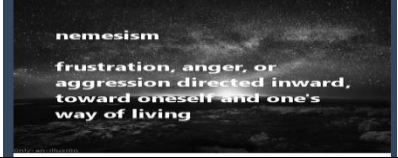
Substance	When drugs are represented relating to harm. This could be an image of a person taking substances or when substances are represented i.e. a marijuana cigarette, or pills	
Eating Disorder	When an eating disorder is represented. This could be in the form of an image relating to weight, i.e. scales, or in the form of a thin body.	
Suicide	When suicide is represented, i.e. through an overdose or through hanging (when a figure is represented in a noose). Or when a method of suicide is represented, i.e. a noose, a gun or a figure on train tracks.	
Mixed method self-harm	Where more than one type of self-harm is represented. For example bruising and scratching represented together.	
Not Identified	When the type of self-harm is not identified.	
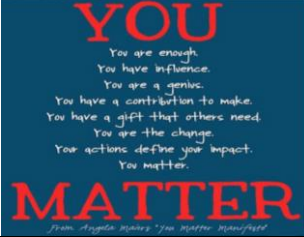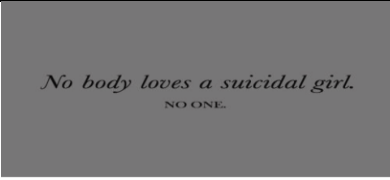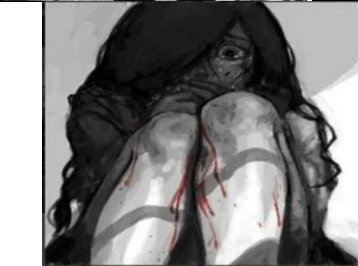
Other	Alternative methods of self-harm not represented i.e. head-banging	
Body Part		
Head	Any harm that is done to the head, including face, hair, scalp and neck. Including photographs and drawings.	
Arm	Any harm that is done to the arm. Including photographs and drawings.	
Leg	Any harm that is done to the leg. Including photographs and drawings.	
Hip	Where harm is done to the hip area of the body	
Torso	Where harm is done to the torso of a body	
Breast area	Any harm that is done to the breast or breast area, i.e. right underneath the breast. Including photographs, or drawings.	
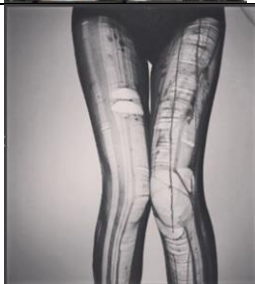
More than one place on the body	Where any harm is done to more than one place on the body, for example arms and legs. This will also include images of eating disorders, for example thin bodies.	
Not Identified	All images that do not show a place on the body that has been harmed	
Other	Other parts of the body not represented, i.e. ears, toes, tongue	
Severity of Self-Injury		
Severe self-injury	Severe self-injury relates to injuries that are severe in nature. This would include injuries that are deep and numerous and injuries that are life threatening. This would also include injuries that have required medical attention. This would also include severe injuries to drawn characters. These may be more severe as drawn self-injury can go further than actual self-injury. For example this might include deep gashes to the legs, torso. Severe self-injury would also include severe burning where a lot of the skin has been burnt or the burn is clearly deep. If more than one type of self-harm presented then the image is rated on the highest level of severity.	
Moderate self-injury	Moderate self-injury relates to injuries that are less severe. So these could include numerous cuts that are not deep or life threatening. There may be blood present but the blood would not amount to a significant loss of blood.	
Superficial self-injury	Superficial self-injury relates to superficial injuries that are not deep at all, rather they may appear more like scratches or extremely shallow cuts. There is generally not a lot of blood and less numerous injuries.	

Scar	This relates to images where there are healed cuts that have turned into scars. These images show no new cuts.	
Bandaged	This relates to images where body parts are seen to be bandaged.	
Not Identified	All images that do not include an observation of self-harm, for example text images that relate to cutting but do not include an image of a cut body so it is impossible to determine the severity.	
Stated message characteristics		
Stated Purpose		
Inform others	Where the purpose of the message is to inform others. This could be through articles or information about self-harm.	
Reach out	Where images are used to reach out to others by offering advice or support. For example through alternatives to self-harm or helping people to see a positive / not harm themselves.	
Share recovery	Where the purpose of the message is to share recovery stories. This could include recovery stories from the posters perspective or from others. This include images that state how long the poster has not engaged in self-harm.	
Inspire	Where the purpose of the message is to inspire others. This could include inspirational quotes or motivational messages about change, it could also be messages of hope.	

Reasons why and function	Where images suggest the motivation behind self-harm or the function of the behaviour	
Discouraging self-harm	Images that suggest the purpose is to discourage self-harm in others	
Share feelings	Where the purpose appears to be to explicitly share the feelings of the poster	
Share weightless / thinness	To share the thin body or weighhtloss	

Share joke	Where a joke is intended, this could include ironic jokes about self-harm	
Identify with others	Where the purpose appears to represent an identification with others or an identification with a group of people	
Other	To encourage self-harm in others, or to blame or shame others	
Uncertain	All images with an ambiguous stated purpose	
Stated emotional tone		
Anger	Where there is an angry tone to the message. This could be through the poster using swearing in anger or challenging others. This could also be messages that contain anger towards others or anger turned inwards.	
Sadness	Where there is a sadness to the message. This captures messages of sadness, despair, upset.	

Hope	Where there are messages of hope presented. This could be in terms of hope for oneself and for one's own situation. This could also be presented in instilling hope in others.	
Feeling alone	Where there is a clear tone where the poster is suggested the feel alone or are lonely.	
Overwhelmed	Messages that suggest the poster is feeling overwhelmed with their situation.	
Pride	Images that suggest there is pride in what the poster is representing. i.e. in images where it appears the poster is pleased with what they have done for example with their weight loss	
Afraid	Where the image suggests an emotion of being scared or afraid. This could be in text stating being scared or afraid or in the image	
Happy	Images that suggest an emotion of happiness, in a photograph of a person or in text or characterisation	
Other	Emotion – disgust, shame/embarrassment	
Uncertain	All images with ambiguous emotional tones	
Colour		

Colour	An image of any kind that is in colour or includes colour in any way in the image.	
Black and White	An image of any kind that is in black and white and includes no colour at all in the image. This includes all images that are in grayscale.	

Appendix Five– Themes changing over time

Twitter

Saviours	Drawing	Recovery	Analogy	Hive Mind	Mockery
Idealising	It's helping	Semi-colon	Appropriation	Follow me	Mockery of self-harm
Celebrity	Venting	Display	Brexit	Interact	Emo
	Art as catharsis	Tattoo	Contemporary		
	Self-injury	Artefacts			

Appropriation	Recovery	Showing my cuts	Substitution and venting	Tattoo	Outrage	Mockery
Brexit		Showing my cuts	Drawing self-harm	Cover-up	Follow me	Emo
Self-harm as analogy			Creating artefacts	Identity	Hive mind	
Black humour						

Appropriation	Hive Mind	Recovery	Drawing self-harm
Brexit	Follow me		
Black humour	Outrage		

Instagram

Gender	Body image	Coping	Body as communication	Motivations	Hiding in sight	Identity	Addiction
The absent male	Control	Overwhelmed	Display				
Sexualised	The thin body	Relationships	Communication				
Subverted Glamour							

Motivation	Advice	Showing my cuts	Gender	Identity	Hiding in sight	The language of addiction	Body Image
Sense of self			Subverted Glamour	Belonging		Compulsion and control	Idealised control
Overwhelmed			Sexualised	Sub-culture		Recovery	Thin body
coping						Relapse	

The language of addiction	Motivation	Identity	Gender	Body image
Recovery	Feeling Overwhelmed	Sub-culture	Subverted glamour	The thin body
Compulsion and control	Sense of self	Belonging	Sexualised	Idealised control
Relapse	Coping behaviours			

Tumblr

Drawn self-harm	Recovery	Addiction	Display	Sexualised	Sadness
Sexual drawings	Pride	Longing	Hidden self-harm	Subverted glamour	Low self-esteem
substitution and venting	It's a journey		Sadness	Idealised form	Personal journey
Ambiguous			Pride		Relationships with self
Characterisation					Famous images
					It won't get better
					Too many feelings

Gender	The language of addiction	Showing self-harm	Sadness	Drawn self-harm
Sexualised / idealised	Compulsion	Showing cuts	Low self-worth	Substitution / venting
Subverted glamour	Working on change	Alternatives	It's not OK	Sexualised
	Memorialising		Too many feelings	Artefacts
	Recovery		Relationships with self	

Gender	The language of addiction	Articulated Distress	Drawn self-harm
Sexualised/idealised form	Compulsion	Low self-worth	Sexual drawings
Subverted glamour	Recovery	Too many feelings	Substitution and venting
	Memorialising	Relationships with self	

Cross site

Instagram	Tumblr	Twitter
Addiction	Addiction	Recovery
Motivation	Articulated Distress	X
Identity	X	X
Gender	Gender	X
Body Image	Gender	X
X	Drawn self-harm	Drawing self-harm
X		Appropriation
X	X	Hive Mind